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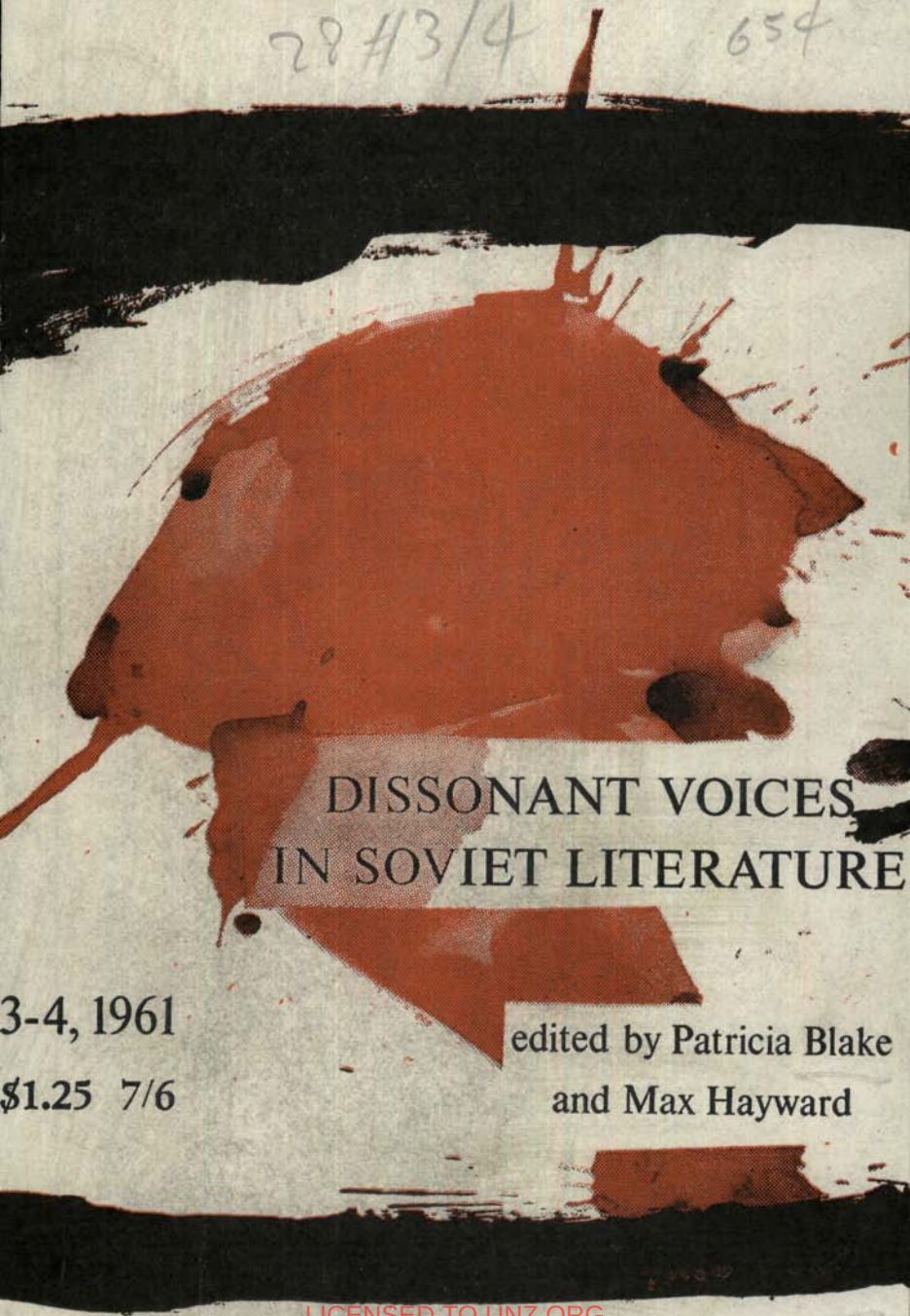

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DISSONANT VOICES IN SOVIET LITERATURE

Edited by Patricia Blake and Max Hayward

VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 3-4, 1961

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PATRICIA BLAKE is a critic and professional journalist specializing in the Soviet Union. She was a correspondent in Moscow for **Life**, and edited an anthology of Mayakovsky's poetry and theater last year for Meridian Books. She is presently working on a study of Isaac Babel.

MAX HAYWARD is a specialist in Russian literature, and a Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford. From 1947 to 1949 he was attached to the British Embassy in Moscow. He is co-translator of Boris Pasternak's **Dr. Zhivago** and the translator of Abram Terz's **The Trial Begins**, both published by Pantheon Books.

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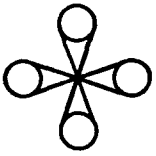

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Max Hayward

INTRODUCTION
SOVIET LITERATURE 1917-1961

This miscellany of Soviet writing covers a period of forty-three years, beginning with an early prose fragment by Boris Pasternak written in 1918 and ending with an extract from the memoirs of Ilya Ehrenburg, which are currently being published in the monthly *Novy Mir*.

The picture which emerges is inevitably very incomplete, but the editors hope they may have succeded in their principal aim of showing that the Soviet period has been by no means as barren in literary achievement as is often supposed. Apart from years of utter sterility—notably the years 1947 to 1953—there has been a fairly steady output of work, some of which is not unworthy of the great tradition from which it ultimately springs.

Needless to say, much Soviet writing can only be appreciated against the background in which it was produced and the purpose of this introduction is to sketch the changing climate in which Soviet writers have lived and worked.

The Russian intelligentsia, not least the writers, were divided in their attitude to the Bolshevik Revolution of October, 1917. Many, like Bunin, Leonid Andreyev, Kuprin, Zaitsev, Merezhskovsky and others could not reconcile themselves to Lenin's usurpation of power and emigrated at the earliest possible opportunity. Others like Ilya Ehrenburg, Alexei Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky were more ambivalent in their attitude. At first sceptical of the new regime, they made their peace with it—for different

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reasons—and loyally served it, once they had convinced themselves that it was there to stay. It is interesting to note that it was the very few *Marxist* writers, such as Evgeny Zamyatin and Maxim Gorky, who were at the time the most implacably hostile to Lenin's coup d'état. Like Rosa Luxemburg, Gorky prophesied that the Bolshevik seizure of power would inevitably lead to the dictatorship of one man, and he violently denounced Lenin for his arrogance and "seigneurial" contempt for the Russian people. Zamyatin, as we can see from his article on "Literature, Revolution and Entropy," clearly foresaw all the dangers of the Bolshevik monopoly of power for the free development of literature and the arts. Unlike Gorky, who had a fatal weakness for successful strongmen—one is reminded of G. B. Shaw—Zamyatin remained irreconcilably hostile and managed to emigrate from the Soviet Union in 1931—not long after Gorky finally returned to Moscow to become Stalin's confidant and advisor in literary matters. In the latter capacity Gorky was responsible for the formulation of the doctrine of "socialist realism."

There was a third category of writers, notably Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely and Sergei Esenin, who greeted the October Revolution with unbridled enthusiasm as the secular consummation of a mystic vision. Politically naive, they saw in the *grand chambardement* of October the beginning of a millennial "revolution of the spirit" which would somehow, out of the chaos, the squalor and the bloodshed, produce a spiritual transfiguration of mankind ("Transfiguration" is the title of one of Esenin's poems in 1917) and the realization of ancient dreams. By a strange irony, therefore, Soviet literature had its beginnings in the religious ecstasy of a small group of poets who were the very antithesis of the cold-blooded engineers of October. An even greater paradox is that Blok, the ethereal, otherworldly symbolist, and Bely, the even more otherworldly esotericist (he was the leading Russian disciple of Rudolf Steiner) greeted the Revolution with poems steeped in Christian imagery. In Blok's "Twelve," Jesus Christ "in a white crown" leads the triumphal march of the Red

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Guards and in Bely's "Christ is Risen" (1918), Russia's ordeal by revolution is compared to Calvary: the martyrdom of the Cross will be followed by Resurrection. Esenin, too, used religious symbols to convey his vision of the Revolution as the dawn of a golden age for the Russian peasants. In his poem "Inonia," dedicated to the prophet Jeremiah, he violently rejected Christ, in the grand tradition of Russian atheism, in favor of Man, the omnipotent Demiurge: "I shall fear neither death / Nor javelins, nor hail of darts, / Thus speaks according to the Bible, the prophet Esenin, Sergei. / My hour is at hand, I fear not the scourge. / I spit out of my mouth the Host, the body of Christ. / I will not accept salvation through his torment and the Cross: / I know another teaching which pierces the eternal stars. / I behold another Coming / In which death doesn't dance on truth. . . ."

This kind of inverted religious language was also characteristic of Mayakovsky's work at the time of the Revolution. Already before it, in "Cloud in Trousers" (1915), he had proclaimed himself the John the Baptist of the Revolution: "at the head of hungry hordes, / the year 1916 cometh / in the thorny crown of revolutions. / In your midst, his precursor, I am where pain is —everywhere; / on each drop of the tear-flow / I have nailed myself on the cross. . . ." His first major work in honor of the Revolution was a mock mystery play (*Mystery Bouffe,* 1918) which is a brilliant farcical reenactment of the story of the Flood, with God, Methuselah, Beelzebub and Lloyd George playing minor roles. Mayakovsky's transposition of the revolutionary drama into biblical language was, of course, utterly light-hearted and frivolous compared with Esenin's anguished blasphemy, but the underlying emotion was much the same and he was thought of by communist critics as a utopian visionary rather than as a "proletarian" poet. As late as 1934 he could be described by one such critic as "a peculiar kind of utopian socialist, a spokesman of that petty-bourgeois humanistic intelligentsia whose ideological development eventually led to their acceptance of the October

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Revolution."[1] Of *Mystery Bouffe* the same writer said that it still contains "strong echoes of the problems which exercised Mayakovsky in the pre-revolutionary period: abstract man and the socialist paradise." Despite all his flamboyant self-identification with the cause, it was only Stalin's off-handed canonization of him in 1935 which led to the creation of "proletarian" credentials for him and his enthronement as the great tribune and drum-beater of the Revolution. This he certainly was in his own estimation, but he understood the true nature of the Revolution scarcely better than Blok or Esenin. The result was tragedy for all three of them and their last days, in the words of Pushkin's poem, were "without divinity, without inspiration, without tears, without life and without love." Blok was the first to realize his mistake. When he died in 1921 he was already deaf to the "music of the Revolution" which only three years earlier had inspired him to write the first and greatest poem of the Soviet era. The unspeakable agony of his disillusionment is conveyed by Zoshchenko's portrait of him in *Before Sunrise*.

For Esenin, who committed suicide in 1925, the years of disabusement were more productive. Unlike Blok he was able to rescue something from the wreck of his dreams and transmute his disenchantment into poetry, which perhaps better than anything else expresses the tragic alienation of the Russian intelligentsia in the 'twenties. Quickly understanding that October would not, as he had fondly imagined, usher in a peasant paradise of which he would be the prophet, he reconciled himself with gentle submissiveness to the role of a stranger in his own land. He was not against the new way of things, but he could not be a part of it. In a poem written in 1920, he drew a picture of a poor little foal pathetically trying to race a steam-engine; the image well expressed his belated recognition that October meant the advent of a harsh and ruthless machine age which would have no use for his "gentle songs." In "Soviet Russia," written shortly before his

1. N. Plisko, *Literaturnaya Entsiklopedia.*

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death, he accepts, in a mood of trusting patriotism, all that has happened in the country and offers up his soul to October and May. He could no more compete with the crude "proletarian" versifier Demyan Bedny than the poor foal could catch up with the locomotive, but in a pitiful gesture of defiance he refused to abandon his "beloved lyre" to the Revolution. He did not live to see the day when it would inevitably have been wrenched from his grasp.

The case of Mayakovsky is the most intriguing of all. The self-appointed poet laureate of the Revolution, only too anxious to abandon not only himself, but his lyre to the service of the Party ("I want the *Gosplan* to sweat / in debate, / assigning me / goals a year ahead. / I want / a commissar / with a decree / to lean over the thought of the age") he seemed, on the surface, to be more in tune with the new age than any of his contemporaries.

In fact, however, he was one of those hypersensitive and introspective intellectuals for whom only total involvement in the turmoil and chaos of universal upheaval can offer any solution to hopeless inner agony. The Revolution, or rather his image of it, supplied a personal need which had nothing to do with his overt political convictions. When the image began to fade and when he could no longer hide the fact from himself, he put a bullet through his heart.

Boris Pasternak, the fourth great poet of the Soviet era and the only one to survive its worst rigors, was not spellbound by the Revolution. Judging from the evidence of *Dr. Zhivago,* he may have felt a momentary thrill of admiration at its "splendid surgery," but we may surmise that it was as shortlived as with the hero of his novel. Yet perhaps he understood the revolutionary temperament better than most of his contemporaries. The portrait of Antipov-Strelnikov in *Dr. Zhivago* is full of sympathetic insight into the character of a man who sacrifices life and love to an impersonal cause. The fragment "Without Love" shows that Pasternak was preoccupied with this problem as early

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as 1918. The title, which in Russian is an invented word (*bezlyubye,* meaning roughly "lovelessness") evidently refers to the suppression of all personal feeling in the name of the Revolution, about which the young social-revolutionary conspirator Kovalevsky is thinking as he travels with his easy-going friend Goltsev to some industrial town in the Urals. The contrast between Goltsev and Kovalevsky foreshadows the relationship between Yury Zhivago and Antipov-Strelnikov in the novel written some forty years later. While Goltsev is thinking of the woman he loves (who, like Lara in the novel, goes to the front as a nurse), Kovalevsky is entirely absorbed in his thoughts about the Revolution—thoughts which "meant more to him than his fur coat and his belongings, more than his wife and child, more than his own life and more than other people's lives. . . ." There is an obvious symbolism in the fact that, while dreaming his dreams of Revolution, Kovalevsky imagines that his companion is asleep and that he himself is awake. In reality it is the other way round: it is Goltsev, with his more down-to-earth thoughts, who is awake. "Without Love" hence already contains in embryo one of the central themes of *Dr. Zhivago,* namely the trance-like state of those men who, like Kovalevsky and Antipov, attempt to apply "final" solutions to all the problems of humanity and who eventually wake up to the illusoriness of their efforts.

In the first decade after the Revolution it was possible for such moods as these to be expressed with more or less freedom. True, there was a fairly tight censorship, known as *Glavlit,* but its functions were mainly negative, i.e. to prevent the appearance in print of openly "counter-revolutionary" work. The Soviet prose of the period was, on the whole, remarkably objective in portraying the realities of the Revolution, the Civil War and the period of N.E.P. The brutal naturalism of Isaac Babel (represented in this issue by "The Journey") was accepted almost without criticism; Leonid Leonov was able to show, in *The Badgers* (1925), the hostility of the peasant masses to marauding Bolshevik requisitioners from the towns, and in *The Thief* (1927),

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the demoralization during N.E.P. of an idealistic communist who had fought in the Civil War; Sholokhov described in the first two volumes of *And Quiet Flows the Don* (1928), with an impartiality quite impermissible by later standards, the complicated clash of loyalties—by no means explicable only in terms of class-warfare—which the Revolution produced among simple people. Almost all the human problems which arose in the aftermath of the great upheaval—the conflict between town and country, the collapse of utopian illusions, the inner doubts of the intellectuals, the material hardships of the population as a whole—all these and many other problems were presented truthfully, if not always sympathetically, in early Soviet literature. Most of the best writers of the period belonged to the category dubbed by Trotsky as the "fellow-travelers." For the most part intellectuals by origin, they varied considerably in the degree of their loyalty to the new regime, but like "bourgeois specialists" in other fields, they were endowed with special skills which made them indispensable to it and they were, therefore, at first protected from excessive interference by the so-called "proletarian" writers. The latter were as vociferous as they were untalented, but their attempts to force the "fellow-travelers" into absolute conformity were given little official encouragement until 1929. Until this year general Party supervision of literary and artistic affairs had been the responsibility of Anatoly Lunacharsky, one of the most cultivated of the Old Bolsheviks and himself a writer of standing, who exercised great tact in his handling of cultural problems. Under his aegis there was an uneasy coexistence between the "fellow-travelers," grouped mainly in the All-Russian Union of Writers and the "proletarians" of the Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). In another part of the memoirs excerpted in this issue, Ilya Ehrenburg writes of Lunacharsky:

"In their reminiscences of him people have spoken about his 'enormous erudition' and his 'many-sided culture.' I was struck by something different: he was not a poet, he was absorbed in his political activities, but he had an extraordinary love

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for art and he always seemed to be tuned in to those elusive waves to which many others are deaf. On the rare occasions when we met we would argue. His views were alien to me. But he was very far from any desire to impose them on other people. The October Revolution put him in command of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment and there is no denying that he was a good shepherd. 'I have said dozens of times'—[wrote Lunacharsky]—'that the Commissariat of Enlightenment must be impartial in its attitude towards the various trends of artistic life. As regards questions of artistic form, the tastes of the People's Commissar and other persons in authority should not be taken into account. All individual artists and all groups of artists should be allowed to develop freely. No one trend, by virtue of its traditional renown or its fashionable success, should be allowed to oust another.' It is a pity that various people who have been in charge of art, or who have been interested in it, have rarely remembered these wise words."

The end of Lunacharsky's relatively mild stewardship spelled the end of freedom for literature in Russia and the beginning of an enforced state of "entropy" which went on for the next twenty-two years. 1929 was in general the "year of the great turning point," as Stalin aptly described it, and with the final defeat of all political opposition, whose fate was sealed by the capitulation of Bukharin at the 16th Party conference, the stage was set for the "revolution from above" which meant the violent transformation of all social and cultural life. In retrospect the N.E.P. period now seemed a golden age of liberalism and laissez-faire. Side by side with the collectivization of the peasants went the so-called "bolshevization" of literature and the arts. This was done by encouraging RAPP to assert the hegemony of the "proletariat" in literature, that is, to allow them to do what Lunacharsky had so far managed to prevent. The leadership of RAPP, under its chairman, Leopold Averbakh, consisted of genuine fanatics who no doubt sincerely believed that only the "proletariat" could create an art that was in harmony with the new way

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of life and that hence "class warfare" must be fostered in cultural life just as was now being done in the countryside: the "fellow traveling" goats must be separated from the "proletarian" sheep. To be a "proletarian" writer did not mean that one was necessarily a worker or a peasant by origin—indeed many of the "proletarian" writers were intellectuals—but one had to identify oneself body and soul with their supposed cause, and submit unquestioningly to their self-appointed and self-perpetuating "avant-garde," the Party. There was at this period a genuine mystique of communion with the "proletariat," and some intellectuals were indeed attracted by this possibility of a quasi-religious sublimation of personality. Like all religious processes it seems to offer a way of shedding the awful burden of individual responsibility and RAPP was successfully able to exploit this appeal in a number of cases. But, like all fanatical proselytizers, they were too impatient to rest content with persuasion and in August 1929 they forced a showdown with the "fellow traveling" writers. This was the first application to Soviet cultural life of the technique of the campaign against certain chosen scapegoats with the object of terrorizing a whole group into submission. The victims on this occasion were Boris Pilnyak, who was chairman of the All-Russian Union of Writers, and Evgeny Zamyatin, who headed the Leningrad branch of the Union. By later standards the campaign was clumsily handled and, as an attempt to compromise Pilnyak and Zamyatin morally, it was a failure. The original charge against them was that both had deliberately arranged for the publication abroad of works which had not been passed by the Soviet censorship: Pilnyak's fragment *Mahogany*, part of which is reproduced in this issue, and Zamyatin's anti-utopian satire *We*. Both writers were able to demonstrate beyond any doubt that they were blameless on this score. In fact Zamyatin had done his best to prevent the publication of *We* abroad and the manuscript of Pilnyak's *Mahogany* had been sent to a Russian publisher in Berlin in accordance with what was then a legal procedure whereby Soviet writers obtained protection under

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the international copyright laws to which the Soviet Union was not a party. By arranging for the simultaneous publication of the original in Moscow and Berlin, it was possible for the author to retain control over translation and other rights abroad. Gorky, Sholokhov, Fedin and other Soviet writers regularly used this procedure. The Berlin firm Petropolis which published Pilnyak's *Mahogany* existed only to perform this service for Soviet writers. Such transactions went through Soviet lawyers and the official society for relations with foreign countries, VOKS. What happened in Pilnyak's case, however, was that Petropolis jumped the gun and published his manuscript prematurely, without waiting for it to be passed for publication in Moscow. When both authors were able to show that they were not guilty of deliberately evading Soviet censorship controls, the RAPP instigators of the campaign against them changed their tack, and concentrated on the alleged anti-Soviet nature of the works in question. They were said to be symptomatic of the work of many "fellow travelers," who were now bluntly told that they must either make manifest their solidarity with the "proletariat" and their complete loyalty to the Party, or forfeit the right to call themselves *Soviet* writers. The word *Soviet* in this context was henceforth to be interpreted not as a mere territorial designation, but as a definition of the writer's political allegiance. After a series of rigged meetings in the various writers' organizations, resolutions were adopted in accordance with which Pilnyak and Zamyatin, together with the whole of the old leadership of the All-Russian Union of Writers, were removed. At the same time the rank-and-file membership was "re-registered" and as many as one half were "purged." To mark the radical change in the literary situation the All-Russian Union of Writers now renamed itself the "All-Russian Union of *Soviet* Writers." All this happened in a society that was not yet entirely cowed—the Stalinist terror was only just beginning—and there were individual protests against the way in which the back of the "fellow traveler" writers' or-

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ganization had been broken. The most powerful came from Gorky who wrote the following in *Izvestia*:

The punishment meted out to Pilnyak is far too severe. . . . All my life I have waged a struggle for care in dealing with people and I think that in our present conditions this struggle should be carried on even more intensively. . . . We have gotten into the stupid habit of raising people up into high positions, only to throw them down into the mud and the dust. I need not quote examples of this absurd and cruel practice, because such examples are known to everybody. I am reminded of the way in which thieves were lynched in 1917-1918. These dramas were generally the work of petty bourgeois elements, and one is reminded of them every time one sees with what delight people throw themselves on a man who has made a mistake in order to take his place.

This was perhaps the last publicly voiced protest in the Soviet Union against a literary frameup. Later victims enjoyed neither the benefit of such support, however muted, from their colleagues, nor the luxury of being able to reply to their accusers. One cannot help wondering whether history might not have taken a somewhat different turn if more had been as courageous and uncompromising as Evgeny Zamyatin, who wrote in a letter to *Literary Gazette* on September 16, 1929:

When I returned to Moscow after a summer journey the whole affair of my book *We* was already over. It had been established that the appearance of fragments from *We* in *Volia Rossii* in Prague was a deliberate act on my part, and in regard to this 'act' all the necessary resolutions had been adopted. But facts are stubborn. They are more stubborn than resolutions. Every one of them may be confirmed by documents or by people and I wish to make them known to my readers. . . . [He goes on to give conclusive proof that the publication of parts of *We* in the émigré *Volia Rosii* was none of his doing.] . . . Thus first there was a condemnation and only then an investigation. I imagine that no court in the world has ever heard of such a procedure. . . . A meeting of the Moscow branch of

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the All-Russian Union of Writers, without waiting for my explanations, or even expressing a desire to hear them, adopted a resolution condemning my 'act.' The general meeting of the Leningrad branch was called on September 22nd and I know of its results only through the newspapers. . . . From these it is evident that in Leningrad my explanations had been read and that here the opinion of those present was divided. A number of the writers, after hearing my explanations, considered the whole incident closed. But the majority found it more prudent to condemn my 'act.' Such was the act of the All-Russian Union of Writers and from this act I draw my conclusions: To belong to a literary organization which, even indirectly, takes part in the persecution of a co-member, is impossible for me, and I hereby announce my withdrawal from the All-Russian Union of Writers.

A year or so later, after being subjected to all kinds of petty humiliation and virtually having been excluded from the literary life of Russia (his stage version of Leskov's famous *conte, The Steel Flea,* scheduled for production in a Leningrad theater, was withdrawn solely because of the "notoriety" of its author) Zamyatin wrote an astonishing letter to Stalin[2] in which he requested that his "condemnation to death" as a writer be commuted to exile from the Soviet Union, as provided for under the Soviet penal code, and even more astonishingly—owing perhaps to the intercession of Gorky—Stalin granted his request. Pilnyak, on the other hand, made a groveling submission (in private—public recantations were not yet *de rigueur* in cases such as these) and he perished a few years later during the Yezhov terror.

The 'thirties—which are not represented in this issue at all—were not the worst years for Soviet literature (these were to come after 1946) but they saw the establishment of those features of Soviet literature which distinguish it from all other literatures in the world. What makes it unique is that these features were imposed from without. It is obvious that literature need not

2. The full text is reproduced in *Litsa,* Chekhov Press, New York, 1955.

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necessarily suffer from purely negative limitations on the right of publication (nineteenth-century Russian literature and early Soviet literature flourished under censorship) or from the *voluntary* acceptance of a particular set of doctrinal terms of reference (as in the case of Catholic writers), but when matters of form and content are strictly regulated in accordance with extra-literary criteria, the result is very serious for creative effort. The way in which "socialist realism" was made binding on Soviet writers, the reasons for it and the consequences of this imposition must be outlined.

In April, 1932, the Central Committee of the CPSU unexpectedly issued a decree ordering the disbandment of RAPP, the now cowed and emasculated All-Russian Union of Soviet Writers and other residual groups, and setting up in their place the Union of Soviet Writers which exists in the same form today. It was made clear that membership in this new unitary organization would be essential for anyone who wished to make writing his livelihood. One of Stalin's reasons for discarding the "proletarians" of RAPP (many of whom, including Averbakh, were later denounced and liquidated as "Trotskyists") was no doubt that, once they had performed their task of bringing to heel the "fellow travelers," their excessive zeal, which had been an advantage for this purpose, was now only an embarrassment to him. Stalin much preferred compliant "fellow travelers" to fanatical Marxist idealists, many of whom, like Akim and his uncle in Pilnyak's tale, were indeed temperamentally more in tune with the fervent intellectualism of Trotsky than with the humdrum empiricism of Stalin. In general the 'thirties are remarkable for the fact that genuine Marxists were gradually replaced in many fields by people with a "bourgeois" and even "counter-revolutionary" past who were willing to pay lip service to anything as the price of survival. Thus the bourgeois historians Tarle and Wipper were called in to glorify Kutuzov and Ivan the Terrible while the veteran Marxist Pokrovsky was denounced for "vulgar sociologism," i.e., for writing history as Marx and Engels had

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written it. In literature—with consummate skill it must be admitted—the former count Alexei Tolstoy showed that his master had a not unworthy forerunner in Peter the Great.

To be a writer one now not only had to be a member of the Union of Soviet Writers but also one had to subscribe to the "method" of socialist realism. This method—the question as to whether it is a "method" or a "theory" has never satisfactorily been resolved by the pundits—was elaborated in open debate during the two years between the Party decree of 1932 and the first Congress of Soviet writers in 1934 when the doctrine was promulgated by Zhdanov, who made his debut on this occasion as Stalin's great Panjandrum in cultural matters. The theory appears to have been devised by Gorky in consultation with Stalin. For Gorky the principal intention was no doubt to keep Soviet literature in the mainstream of the classical realist tradition of which he himself was the last great representative, but for Stalin, as well as being in keeping with his own pedestrian tastes, it must have seemed an attractive way of subordinating literature and the arts to his purposes. Essentially an attempt to combine incompatible elements, it was from the first riddled with contradictions and was hence rarely satisfactorily applied from the official point of view. The inherent contradictoriness of the theory has best been described by the anonymous Soviet author of an essay on socialist realism first published in the French magazine *Esprit* in February 1959:

> If many [Soviet] writers are going through a crisis at the moment . . . it is because they have to seek a compromise and unite what cannot be united: the 'positive hero,' who logically lends himself to schematized, allegorical treatment—with psychological character study; an elevated declamatory style—with description of prosaic, everyday life; a sublime ideal—with verisimilitude to reality. This results in a monstrous salad. The characters [of Soviet fiction] torment themselves almost à la Dostoevsky, grow sad almost à la Chekhov, arrange their family life almost à la Tolstoy, and yet at the same time vie with each other in shouting platitudes from the Soviet

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press: 'Long live peace in the whole world' and 'Down with the warmongers'. This is neither classicism nor realism. It is semi-classical demi-art of a none too socialist demi-realism." [NOTE: The full text of this important essay will shortly be published by Pantheon Books.]

What it amounted to was that the Soviet writers were to model themselves on the nineteenth-century Russian classics (Gorky himself launched the slogan "Learn from the classics!") and adopt a kind of composite style based on the language of Turgenev, Tolstoy and Chekhov (Dostoevsky was less favored as time went on). All the modernist movements of the beginning of the century and the early Soviet period (symbolism, imagism, futurism—of which Mayakovsky was a product—and the rich "ornamental" style which Pilnyak and others derived from Andrei Bely and Remizov) were declared to have been an aberration in the development of Russian literature and were henceforth denounced as "formalism." Strictly speaking, "formalism" had been nothing more than the name of a highly interesting and original method of literary criticism (its protagonists, such as Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, referred to it as "the formal method in literature" and its enemies called it "formalism") which had concentrated on the analysis of form in art and literature. It arose in the early 'twenties among a group of young critics and linguists who set themselves the task of restoring the balance in Russian literary criticism which had always been almost exclusively concerned with matters of content. In the era of socialist realism the word "formalism" was misappropriated, like many other terms, and came to cover a multitude of sins. It became a blanket term of abuse for the slightest deviation from the run-of-the-mill "realist" style and was freely applied to anyone, whatever the nature of his offense, who seemed to the now ubiquitous watchdogs to be in any way "off-beat."

But the greatest difficulty for the writers was that, in accordance with the formula laid down by Zhdanov, they were

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expected to employ the realist style of the nineteenth-century classics in a spirit which was quite alien to its creators. An essential feature of the new doctrine was the sharp distinction to be drawn between "socialist" realism and the "criticial" realism of the classics. The latter, it was said, had used the realist method to *negate* the society in which they lived, whereas the Soviet writer was required by the same method to *affirm* the new socialist order which was *ex hypothesi* the most benevolent and the most nearly perfect ever established on earth. It was therefore incumbent on the writers not only to describe it "realistically in its revolutionary development" (Zhdanov's phrase), but also to assist the Party in its task of completing the social transformation now in progress, of consolidating the gains already made and of educating people in the ways of virtue. Since, in Marxist theory, consciousness always lags behind economic and social change, there were still admittedly many wayward citizens who were slow to realize the benefits of the new order, their minds being infected by "survivals of capitalism." One of the writers' principal duties was to expose and hold up to scorn these "survivals," and thus hasten the day when all would model themselves on the New Man. In the words of Stalin's famous *obiter dictum,* writers were to be "engineers of human souls."[3] A sanction for this total subjection of literature to the will of the Party was found in an essay of Lenin's, "Party Literature and the Party Organization," written in 1906. In it Lenin insisted that anybody who wrote for social-democrat journals should express the general line of the Party. In post-1905 conditions, when journals of different political complexions could be published more or less freely in Russia, this was a perfectly reasonable and legitimate demand to make, being designed to exclude interlopers from rival parties. It should be noted, furthermore, that in talking of "literature" in this connection, Lenin was not specifically referring to "belles-lettres." At the first Congress of Soviet writers in 1934 Zhdanov, however,

3. When and where he said this has never been revealed.

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quoted this article as his authority for making *"partiinost"* (roughly: complete submission to the Party line and acceptance of its guidance in all things) the cornerstone of socialist realism. Whether Lenin would have been displeased or not at this chicanery is open to question.

In these conditions, coupled with increasing terror which culminated in the *Yezhovshchina* of 1937, most Soviet writers were faced with an agonizing choice: either to collaborate or to cease writing altogether. Some, like Pasternak and Babel, virtually ceased to publish. Some sought refuge in translation and, to a lesser extent, in writing for children. The majority, however, collaborated to some degree or another. For the collaborators, willing or unwilling, various inner accommodations were necessary. It was no longer possible, as it had been during the 'twenties, to merge body and soul with the proletariat. Nobody merged with anybody anymore. The alienation of man from man was more complete, in the name of collectivism, than it had ever been, possibly, in the whole of human history. Leonid Leonov, easily the most distinguished and subtle of the surviving Soviet novelists, and an avowed disciple of Dostoevsky, continued to write all through the worst period without unduly compromising his artistic integrity. But this was an isolated case. Leonov's rationalization of his position was based on the same sort of mystic nationalism, and probably combined with the same religious messianism, as one finds in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*. For Leonov bolshevism is only one episode in the eternal destinies of Russia. He may even have been intrigued by the special problems of writing within the cramped confines of socialist realism and he may well have regarded his work in these conditions as a kind of *podvig* (spiritual feat) in the Russian Orthodox tradition. His was the noblest type of collaboration and it was undoubtedly motivated by a feeling of duty towards his generation. Not everybody could enjoy the relative luxury of silence and he felt it necessary to convey to his readers—through all the almost insuperable barriers—something of the truth about man and Rus-

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sia. In this, for all those capable of interpreting his subtle ambiguities, he succeeded well. His most impressive "feat" was the novel *Russian Forest,* written in the most difficult years preceding Stalin's death and published in 1953. Impeccably "socialist realist" in tone and structure, this novel yet manages to suggest by devious symbolism that human affairs and the fate of Russia are much more complex than the crude over-simplifications of official thought would ever follow. Ilya Ehrenburg adapted himself to circumstances, but with far less success from a literary point of view, for very different reasons from those of Leonid Leonov. Essentially an internationalist in outlook, he adopted the "lesser evil" fallacy that fascism, of the two competing totalitarian systems which threatened to dominate the world, was palpably the more evil; an intellectual who wished to work for its defeat could not logically refuse support to Soviet communism, even in its rapidly degenerating Stalinist form. Who shall say he was wrong? Judging from his work after Stalin's death he has considerably modified his previous attitude and he now appears as a strong champion of greater independence for Soviet writers.

Leonov and Ehrenburg are the best examples of the two main types of adaptation to the exigencies of socialist realism and stringent Party control over literary life. There were of course other categories. A small minority, including Alexander Fadeyev who committed suicide in 1956, fanatically believed in socialist realism and, by virtue of their sincerity, they were able to use the method with somewhat greater effect than those, like Alexei Surkov (a former RAPPist and Fadeyev's successor as secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers) in whom one may suspect a considerable element of cynical opportunism. Sholokhov stood apart, apparently not caring, writing scarcely anything and basking complacently in his officially-sponsored and quite incongruous reputation as the greatest socialist realist of them all. This judgment, together with Stalin's canonization of Mayakovsky, made the work of the literary theorists even more difficult. *And Quiet*

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Flows the Don, written well before the promulgation of the new doctrine, offends many of the canons of socialist realism, not least by the comparative objectivity of its treatment of history, its naturalistic language in scenes involving violence or sex and the moral ambiguity of its hero. A year or two ago, addressing a group of Czech writers in Prague, Sholokhov said that he had not the faintest idea of what was meant by socialist realism.

What it meant in practice, particularly in the post-war years, was an extreme schematism in the presentation of character which would scarcely be tolerated in even the most fourth-rate cowboy film, a falsification, blatant beyond belief, of native and foreign realities, both past and present, and a drab emasculated language reminiscent of Tolstoy and Gorky at their worst. The latter conducted a campaign in the middle 'thirties for the "purity" of the Russian language and Soviet writers, in their anxiety to avoid being charged with "naturalism" (a cardinal offense against "realism") began to use a sterilized language carefully shorn of all the expressive slang and dialect which had been characteristic of Russian writing in the 'twenties. Plots became more and more simple and their outcome more and more predictable. Optimism reigned supreme and all endings were happy, except of course, in capitalist countries.[4]

The outbreak of war in 1941 made an immense difference. In a memorable passage at the end of *Dr. Zhivago* Pasternak has described how the war "broke the spell of the dead letter." The almost universal sense of liberation from the unbearable terrors and shams of peacetime is also conveyed in the poem by Julia Neiman in this issue. The Stalinist terror—and this may well have been one of its principal aims—had so atomized society, mistrust among people (even among members of the same family) was so intense, and the public obligation, again in Pasternak's words, "to praise what you hate most and to grovel before

4. Frightened editors were often as much to blame as the writers for this state of affairs as readers may judge from Polyakov's *Fireman Prokhorchuk.*

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what makes you unhappy" had become so intolerable, that the ordeal of the war came as a blissful release.

In that year of "camouflage," as Julia Neiman says in her poem, people saw each other without masks. Human bonds were restored in the face of death and suffering, and in the camaraderie of war people began to trust each other again. Most Soviet writers served at the front as war correspondents and many were killed. Freed of the enforced hypocrisies of peacetime, they wrote about people and things with relative truth and sincerity. Apart from excellent war-reportage there was a number of novels and poems of high quality which will survive. Simonov's *Days and Nights* and *Russian People,* Korneichuk's *Front,* Vasily Grossman's *The People is Immortal,* Fadeyev's *Young Guard* (before he rewrote it on the instructions of the Party) and particularly Vershigora's unfinished *Men with a Clear Conscience,* a remarkable account of partisan warfare in the Ukraine, are real works of literature. Surkov and Simonov will be remembered for their wartime lyrics. The new-found feeling of solidarity and relative freedom from fear made it possible for editors to publish work which could scarcely have appeared in print before the war. Perhaps the most extraordinary example is Zoshchenko's *Before Sunrise,* extracts from which appear in this issue. Poets who had long been silent, such as Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova, were published again.

The wartime solidarity which had sprung up among Russians was intolerable to Stalin. He regarded mutual trust among people as tantamount to a conspiracy against himself and he hastened to bring it to an end. The greater freedoms which the writers had enjoyed during the war were abruptly destroyed in August, 1946. The technique was very much the same as in the case of Pilnyak and Zamyatin eighteen years before. This time the chosen scapegoats were Zoshchenko, Akhmatova and Pasternak. In a denunciatory speech of unparalleled scurrility Zhdanov accused Zoshchenko and Akhmatova (whom he described as "half-nun and half-whore") of disarming the Soviet people in

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their struggle to build communism, of disorienting and demoralizing Soviet youth and of undermining the principles of socialist realism by writing in a subjective and pessimistic way without regard for the great political ideas from which the people drew its inspiration. Zhdanov's speech was followed by a decree of the Central Committee which ordained the strict observance of socialist realism and announced certain practical measures to insure that there would be no backsliding from it in the future. *Leningrad,* one of the journals which had published offending work, was abolished altogether and the other, *Zvezda,* was put under the charge of a member of the Central Committee. The easy-going Tikhonov, whose "fellow-traveling" past had been anything but orthodox, was replaced as secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers by the fanatical Fadeyev. The orgy of denunciation in the press after this decree was as bad as anything before the war. The atmosphere of terror was reestablished and all the gains made during the war were wiped out. The years that followed were unimaginable. Literature and the arts ceased to exist in any recognizable form. The cinema was almost completely destroyed. After the Central Committee's decree denouncing, among other films, the second part of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible,*[5] most of the studios were closed down and there was consequently such a shortage of material for the movie houses that several captured Nazi films, dubbed in Russian and billed as "new foreign films," were shown to Soviet audiences. One was the anti-British *School of Hatred,* which had its premiere in Berlin in 1941. It shows the revolt of some Irish schoolboys against their sadistic English master and it ends with the burning of the Union Jack. Another such film, *The Last Round,* is anti-American and it concerns the fixing of boxing-matches in New York; the hero is a blond member of the master race. The showing of these films occurred at a time when the West was fre-

5. Eisenstein was accused of having depicted the "progressive" praetorian guard (*oprichnina*) of Ivan the Terrible as a band of fascist hooligans like the Ku Klux Klan.

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quently accused in the Soviet press of borrowing its propaganda techniques "from the kitchen of the late Dr. Goebbels." The whole atmosphere of the period is suggested in Lev Kassil's allegory "The Tale of the Three Master Craftsmen." Its reference to the terrorization of creative artists by Stalin ("King Vainglorious") is so obvious that one may ask how it ever got into print. It seems likely that the censor who dealt with it was not overanxious to admit that he saw any resemblance between the unhappy kingdom of Sinegoriya and post-war Russia. It is probably unique as an anti-Stalinist satire published while Stalin was still alive.

The death of "King Vainglorious" in March, 1953, had a liberating effect far greater even than that of the war. In the last eight years, though sudden advances have often been succeeded by alarming setbacks, there has been a constant and cumulative improvement in nearly all spheres. Though ultimate Party control of literature and the arts has never been abandoned (and could of course at any moment be restored in all its vigor) it has nevertheless been exercised, on the whole, with restraint and intelligence and has even, for brief periods, been relaxed to a degree which would have been quite inconceivable in Stalin's day. The paraphernalia of socialist realism and particularly the basic concept of *partiinost* have been firmly maintained in theory, but in practice there has often been considerable latitude in the interpretation of them. Outright questioning of the Party's right to control literature has always provoked a strong reaction, but that its wisdom may sometimes be doubted by implication is shown by the passage from Ehrenburg's memoirs quoted above. Altogether one has the impression that censorship controls have gradually been relaxed to some extent, much more being left to the discretion of editors. Since "mistakes" are no longer automatically denounced as crimes, editors have become increasingly ready to take risks. This new confidence is well expressed by the editor of *Novy Mir,* Alexander Tvardovsky, who wrote in one of his poems a few years ago: "In future, too, things may be

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hard, but we shall never again be afraid." The course of events since Stalin's death may be summarized as follows:

At the end of 1953 two articles published in *Novy Mir* cast doubt on socialist realism and the Party's guidance of literature. In his article "On Sincerity in Literature" V. Pomerantsev suggested that the only criterion for a writer should be his own inner convictions. V. Shcheglov, in a review of Leonov's *Russian Forest,* said that the novel's only major defect was that the "negative hero" was not clearly shown to be a product of the Soviet system. Leonov had of course covered himself (or "re-insured" in the writers' argot of those days) by tracing the villain's original sin to the pre-revolutionary conditions in which he grew up. One of the particularly constricting demands of socialist realism is that there can never be the slightest implication that Soviet society might generate its own specific defects. It always had to be made plain that such shortcomings as exist are untypical "survivals of capitalism." Early in 1954 there was a crop of stories and plays which for the first time dealt with certain ugly phenomena in Soviet life. Ehrenburg's *Thaw* hinted at the true nature of the pre-war purges and openly referred to the officially inspired anti-Semitism of the last years of Stalin's life. L. Zorin in his play *The Guests* described a police frame-up, on the lines of the "doctors' plot," and the degeneration of the cynical Soviet bureaucrat responsible for it. Korneichuk's *Wings* was similarly concerned with a deliberate perversion of justice, this time involving the wife of a high Party functionary who had been left behind on enemy-occupied territory during the war and who was, consequently, like so many others in this category, regarded as a traitor. The play is remarkable for the first use in print of the word "concentration camp" instead of the usual euphemistic "corrective labor camp" and for a highly artificial "optimistic" ending (strikingly different from the denouement of Zorin's play). In *Wings* the victim of the outrage renders impassioned thanks to the Central Committee (at this time headed by Malenkov who, in the pursuance of power after Stalin's death,

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was vying with his colleagues for the popular support which would accrue to the one who would first reveal the scope and nature of their late master's misdeeds) for its timely intercession and its determination never to permit such things to happen again. Significantly this play was never attacked during the "freeze-up" of 1954, and it was the first in a genre which should be approached with caution. In the years since Stalin's death the Party has undoubtedly been indulging in what might be called "literary zubatovism"[6] as one of its more intelligent efforts to combat opposition without recourse to brutal repression. By allowing certain writers to outbid genuine protest (it is noteworthy that their "revelations" are always more "sensational" than those of genuine oppositionists who are naturally more cautious) it is evidently hoped that the true writers of the "thaw" may be thereby disarmed and their effect on Soviet readers neutralized. Another patently "zubatovist" work is Galina Nikolayeva's *Battle on the Way* with its interesting description of Stalin's funeral.

The reaction against the first phase of "thaw" literature came during 1954. Simonov attacked Ehrenburg's novel. Pomerantsev's article and Zorin's play were officially condemned in a statement from the Ministry of Culture, and Tvardovsky (as well as Feodor Panferov, the editor of another literary monthly *Oktyabr*) were dismissed from their posts following a public denunciation by Surkov. On the face of it, this looked like a total reversal to Stalinist methods, but in fact it was not. There was no general campaign of intimidation and no gross interference by the Party, which was now already committed to the creation of a somewhat better public image for itself in the eyes of both Russia and the West. There was much to live down and a repeti-

6. Zubatov was a Czarist police official in the early years of the century who with the connivance of his superiors set up trade unions which attempted, with some success, to canalize the workers' revolutionary energies into the comparatively innocuous struggle for economic improvement. It was difficult to tell in the case of many people associated with this unprecedented experiment in "police socialism" who was genuine and who was not.

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tion of the Zhdanov scandal of 1946 would have been inconvenient at this moment. So the covert campaign for freedom went on and at the second Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in December, 1954, there were some notable, albeit cautiously-worded pleas—particularly from A. Yashin, Benjamin Kaverin and Ehrenburg—for a more reasonable approach to the problems of literature. It was clear, however, that the diehards were still overwhelmingly strong and could count on decisive political support, even though they were not allowed to destroy their opponents as they would have done in former days. In the next two years there was an uneasy truce between both camps, neither side going out of its way to be unduly provocative. After Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the 20th Party Congress in 1956, there was a renewed outburst of "oppositional" writing, similar to the one after Stalin's death. In fact 1956 was the *anno mirabilis* of post-War Soviet literature. Apart from Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone,* with its indictment of the Soviet bureaucracy and, even more important, its emphasis on the need for intellectual independence, there was the second volume of the almanac *Literary Moscow,*[7] from which we have taken Julia Neiman's poem. What she says in this about 1941 applied with even greater force to 1956, but unfortunately *Literary Moscow* was published only a few weeks before the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution. The Party's fear of "revisionism" and the neo-Stalinist exploitation of this fear—they could now say in triumph "We told you so!"—led to a setback which at first looked even worse than in 1954. Khrushchev himself, at a famous meeting in a country villa near Moscow, gathered the writers together and admonished them to adhere more strictly to the principles of socialist realism and never to forget that they were the servants of the Party. A hitherto little known writer from Leningrad, Vsevolod Kochetov, wrote an "anti-revisionist" novel, *The Brothers Ershov,* which was

7. The best and most revealing story in this collection, "The Levers," by A. Yashin, was published in the Summer, 1958 issue of *Partisan Review.*

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in effect a denunciation of those Soviet writers responsible for the "thaw." It has an undercurrent of hostility to the intelligentsia as a whole and contrasts it with the right-minded and loyal "proletariat." There are ugly insinuations about Ilya Ehrenburg, the journal *Novy Mir* (which has consistently in the last few years been the main forum of the more independently-minded intellectuals) and the second volume of *Literary Moscow*. The latter, incidentally, was produced by a group of Moscow writers who evidently tried, some time in 1956, to set up a semi-autonomous writers' organization outside the rigidly controlled Union of Soviet Writers. This could easily have led to the creation of a center of intellectual disaffection on the lines of the Petoeffi Circle in Budapest. Although it would hardly have been allowed to develop this far, and would certainly not have made the explosive contact with the workers which was so remarkable in Hungary, it is nevertheless fair to say that anything seemed possible in the hectic atmosphere after Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin. In his novel Kochetov made the ominous point that there could indeed have been a "Hungarian" crisis in Russia itself and that the Soviet intellectuals—he sometimes puts the word in a pejorative diminutive form: *intelligentiki*—of the type of Ehrenburg (who though not mentioned by name is clearly alluded to) would have been morally responsible for it. The lesson of the book is that "revisionism" is potential treachery and that hence the intellectuals must be kept firmly under the control of the "proletariat," i.e. the Party leadership.

For several months after Hungary there was a violent campaign against "revisionism"; for a short time in 1957 Kochetov was editor of the strategic and hitherto on the whole "liberal" *Literary Gazette* and there was scarcely any interesting new literature. In general things looked black. But as in the reaction of 1954, the situation looked more serious than it really was. The Party got over its panic about Hungary and, its confidence restored—probably not least owing to the Soviet triumph in outer

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space—it decided not to use Kochetov, Surkov and the other neo-Stalinists (by now a thoroughly discredited and very small group utterly despised by the majority of Soviet intellectuals) as an instrument against the "opposition." Early in 1958 Kochetov was removed from the editorship of *Literary Gazette* and replaced by S. Smirnov, the author of a "decent" (i.e. "non-zubatovist") novel, *The Brest Fortress,* which describes without the usual embellishments the military debacle of the beginning of the war. The third Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers which took place in May, 1959, marked a very important stage of development in Soviet literary affairs. In a good-humored and conciliatory speech Khrushchev called upon the writers to settle their squabbles among themselves and not come running to the "government" for the solution of their problems and to show more tolerance for writers who had "erred" (there was a specific reference to Dudintsev). Despite the usual ritualistic mention of the dangers of "revisionism" and the cardinal importance of *partiinost,* the effect of this speech was remarkably beneficial and developments since the Third Congress have on the whole been encouraging.[8] By failing to give them the decisive support for which they evidently hoped, Khrushchev in fact disarmed the

8. An interesting sidelight at this Congress was the speech of Boris Polevoi in which he settled accounts with his old friend Howard Fast. One of Fast's reasons for breaking with the Communist Party was that Polevoi, on one of his visits to America, had lied to him about the fate of Kvitko, one of the twenty or so Soviet Yiddish writers who were shot in 1952—a fact which was revealed in the Warsaw *Folkshtimme* in 1956, but which has still not publicly been admitted in the Soviet Union, where Feffer, Bergelson and some of the other dead Yiddish writers are occasionally referred to as having "died tragically." Polevoi said in his speech that the defection of Fast from the ranks of "progressive" literature was more than compensated for by the acquisition of Curzio Malaparte who, according to Polevoi, had applied for membership in the Italian Communist Party on his deathbed. Malaparte, a former Fascist and a correspondent with the Italian division fighting the Russians during the war, is the author of *The Skin,* a novel, in which it is suggested, among other things, that all communists are homosexuals.

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neo-Stalinists, who as a consequence have clearly been on the defensive until the last few months. After the Congress the writers immediately took advantage of Khrushchev's invitation to set their own house in order and ousted Surkov as secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers, appointing the moderate Konstantin Fedin in his place. Furthermore, two former victims of Surkov, Tvardovsky and Panferov, were adopted onto the board of the Union.

In the improved atmosphere of the last two years a considerable amount of interesting work, some specimens of which are given in our collection, has appeared in the literary journals. What is striking about much recent writing is its unorthodoxy, in formal rather than political terms, by the traditional standards of socialist realism. There has been no reversal to the openly "critical" realism of 1956, but there is a new style in prose of almost Chekhovian objectivity, and the once obligatory distortion of Soviet reality, with the presentation of shortcomings in human nature as transitory "survivals of capitalism" untypical of Soviet society, is much less common than it was.

In recent months there have been ominous signs of a comeback on the part of the neo-Stalinists. Last July Kochetov, writing in the popular illustrated weekly *Ogonyok,* described *Novy Mir* as "that paltry little journal which spreads its nihilistic poison among our intelligentsia," and his friend in Leningrad, V. Arkhipov, writing in the neo-Stalinist *Neva,* attacked Ilya Ehrenburg for undermining the principle of *partiinost* and denounced *Literary Gazette* for publishing an article by Norman Cousins, described as "cosmopolitan balderdash." At the end of last year, though probably not as a result of this attack, S. Smirnov was dismissed as the editor of *Literary Gazette* and replaced by his deputy, Kosolapov. Worst of all, Kochetov was appointed at the beginning of this year as the editor of one of the leading literary monthlies, *Oktyabr,* in succession to Feodor Panferov, who died

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last year.[9] To establish his credentials with Soviet readers Kochetov has written a "zubatovist" novel which will shortly appear in *Znamya*. In an excerpt which has already been published, the hero of the novel describes an episode that happened at the outbreak of the war when he was a minor Party official in a town on the Soviet-Lithuanian frontier. As the local headquarters of the N.K.V.D. hastily burn their archives before the evacuation, he has the unique experience of being shown the file on himself by an acquaintance who works there. The file contains forty detailed denunciations written by a man whom he had until then always regarded as his best friend.

It is not certain that the re-emergence of Kochetov, which could scarcely have happened without strong official support, is a sign of some impending regression in Soviet literature. The most likely explanation is that the Party wishes to restore some balance between the two camps which now for the first time since the 'twenties almost openly exist among Soviet writers. There is even a clear identification of certain journals with both sides: the monthlies *Novy Mir* and *Yunost* and the bi-weekly *Literary Gazette* are on the whole "progressive," while *Neva* (and henceforth, presumably, *Oktyabr*) and the bi-weekly *Literatura i Zhizn* are "reactionary." The progressives, now overwhelmingly strong in numbers, are, it is no doubt considered, best kept in check by having the threat of total reaction always hanging over them. This is a better and more intelligent way of imposing restraint on them than by gross administrative interference. Whether the Party will continue to tolerate this unprecedented "two-camp" situation or whether it will find itself compelled (much of course depends on the international situation) to arbitrate decisively in favor of one side or the other side, re-

9. Just before his death Panferov completed a novel, *In the Name of the Young*, which was attacked for its near-pornographical elements. The writer of these lines, who was Panferov's host during his month's visit to England in 1958, is introduced at one stage, under the thinly disguised name of "Mister Wood," in the role of an unsuccessful pimp.

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mains to be seen. For the moment, at any rate, there is a free fight between them.

In a passage at the end of *Dr. Zhivago,* Pasternak says: "Although the enlightenment and liberation which had been expected to come after the war had not come with victory, the presage of freedom was in the air throughout these post-war years, and it was their only historical meaning."

We have seen that there has indeed been a growth of freedom in the years since Stalin's death. The writers have played a great part in this. In this brief and necessarily inadequate survey I have dwelt on some of the more unsavory aspects of Soviet literary history, but I should like to end by saying that the vast majority of Soviet writers, to whom this issue is humbly dedicated, have acquitted themselves with honor in a situation which required more courage, patience, intelligence and fortitude than could ever be imagined by people who live in more fortunate circumstances. One day it will perhaps be shown that not only Russia, but the whole world, is indebted to Soviet literature for keeping alive, in unimaginable conditions, that indefinable sense of freedom which is common to all men.

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Boris Pasternak

WITHOUT LOVE[1]

A CHAPTER FROM A NOVEL

He had a brother and it was the brother who walked round the house, his feet crunching in the snow, and on the frozen steps as he went up them to knock on the door, to knock as one does on the door of a blizzard-swept house when the wind turns your fingers to ice and, whistling and howling, roars into your ears that you should knock even louder, if you know what's good for you . . . and all the time the same wind hammers on the shutters to drown your knocking and confuse the people inside.

They heard him and opened. The house stood on a hill. The door was torn from his grasp together with one of his gloves and, and, as the door flew to and fro and they tried to catch it, the grey snow-swept countryside rushed into the hall

1. This early prose fragment was originally published in an obscure and ephemeral Social-Revolutionary newspaper *Liberty of Labor* (*Volya Truda*), on November 20, 1918, and has only recently come to light. It will be of interest to readers of *Dr. Zhivago* since it shows that already in 1918 Pasternak had arrived at the central conception of his novel, published forty years later. Moreover, it contains three names (Galliula, Gimazetdin and Mekhanoshin) which later appeared in *Dr. Zhivago*, and the episode of the tramcar accident foreshadows three important events in the novel: the death of the hero's father, the interruption of a concert because of an accident to one of the performers, and the death of Zhivago himself. But most interesting of all is the attitude to the revolution and revolutionaries suggested by Kovalevsky's reflections as he travels with his Zhivago-like companion to Moscow, presumably after having heard the news of the abdication of the Czar and of the February Revolution. This aspect of the fragment is discussed at greater length in Mr. Hayward's introduction.

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and breathed on the lamps, bringing with it the distant tinkle of a sleigh-bell. The sound sank in the vast snow-field and, gasping for breath, called to the rescue. It was carried to the house by the overwhelming onrush of the blizzard, which had gripped the door in its clutches, and by the dips in the sleigh-track which had been caught up in some demoniac movement and was slithering under the runners, throwing up swirling columns of choking snow for all to see for miles around.

When the door had been caught and shut they all got up to meet the specter in the hall; in his high boots of reindeer skin he was like a wild animal standing on its hind legs.

—"Is it coming?" Kovalevsky asked.

—"Yes, they're on the way. You must get ready." He licked his lips and wiped his nose. There was pandemonium as bundles and baskets were brought out; the children had sulked since nightfall—till then, for want of something better to do and on learning that everything was packed, and that there would still be a long wait and nothing to talk about, they had pointlessly weighed out raisins on the bare table—and now they set up a great wail, putting the blame on each other:—"It's not me—it's Petya who's howling because papa's going away"—and, seeking fair play and a refuge from the night, the raisins, the blizzard, the chaos, their papas about to depart, the traveling baskets, the oil-lamps and the fur coats, they tried to bury their heads in their mothers' aprons.

But instead they were snatched up, as though on a signal, by their nurses and mothers and carried with a sudden gust of feeling into the passage, and in the hall, which echoed the voices of the coachmen through the folding door, they were held up to their fathers. They all stood bare-headed and, crossing themselves with emotion, exchanged hurried kisses and said it was time to go.

Meanwhile the Tartar coachmen (they were three in number, but there seemed to be ten), carrying lights which splashed the snow without spilling into it altogether, dashed up to the

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horses harnessed in file and, ducking down to look at the girths and fetlocks, jumped up again at once and began to race round like madmen, brandishing their flares and lighting up in turn the trunks standing round the sleigh, the snow, the underbellies and flanks of the horses and their muzzles which together formed a slender garland, borne aloft, as it seemed, by the wind. The moment of departure depended on the Tartars. Roundabout the snow sang in the forest and raved in the open country, and it seemed as though the surging sound of the night knew Tartar and was arguing with Mininbay, who had climbed on to the roof of the sleigh and, clutching at his hands, was telling him to fasten down the trunks not in the way Gimazetdin was shouting, nor in the way suggested by Galliula, who was hardly able to keep his feet because of the storm and had gone quite hoarse. . . . The moment of departure depended on the Tartars. They could hardly wait to take up their whips, whistle at the horses and abandon themselves to the final devil-may-care *aida*.[2] After this no power on earth would hold the horses back. Like drunkards to the bottle the Tartars were drawn irresistibly, more and more eagerly with each passing minute, to the mournful whoops and cajolery of their trade. Hence the feverish movements of their frenzied alcoholic hands as they rushed to help their masters into their heavy fur coats.

And now the flares sent a last farewell kiss to those who were being left behind. Goltsev had already stumbled into the depths of the sleigh and Kovalevsky, floundering in the tails of his three coats, climbed after him under the heavy traveling rug. Unable to feel the floor through their broad felt boots, they nestled down in the straw, the cushions and the sheepskins. A flare appeared on the far side of the sleigh but suddenly bobbed down out of sight.

The sleigh shuddered and heaved. It slithered forward, lurched over and began to turn on its side. A low whistle came

2. A Tartar word meaning, roughly: "let's go!"

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from the depths of an Asian soul and, after righting the sleigh with their shoulders, Mininbay and Gimazetdin leapt into their seats. The sleigh shot forwards as though borne on wings and plunged into the nearby forest. The open country, disheveled and moaning, rose up behind it. It was glad to see the end of the sleigh which disappeared without a trace among the trees with branches like carpet-slippers, at the junction with the main road to Chistopole and Kazan. Mininbay got off here and wishing his master a good journey, vanished in the storm like a flurry of powdered snow. They sped on and on over the arrow-straight highway.

"I asked her to come here with me," one of them thought, breathing in the dampness of thawing fur. "I remember how it was." A lot of tramcars had got stuck in front of the theater and an anxious crowd was milling round the first one. . . . "The performance has begun," the usher said in a confidential whisper and, grey in his cloth uniform, he drew back the cloth curtain separating the stalls from the lighted cloakroom with its benches, galoshes and posters. In the intermission (it went on longer than usual) they walked round the foyer, peering sideways at the mirrors and neither of them knew what to do with their hands which were hot and red. "So there now; thinking it all over," she took a sip of seltzer-water, "I just don't know what to do or how I should decide. So please don't be surprised if you hear that I've gone to the front as a nurse. I shall enroll in a few days' time." . . . "Why don't you come with me to the Kama," he said. She laughed.

The intermission had gone on so long because of the musical item at the beginning of the second act. It could not be played without an oboe, and the oboist was the unfortunate cause of the tramcar stoppage in front of the theater. "He's badly hurt," people whispered to each other taking their places when the painted hem of the curtain began to glow. "He was unconscious when they pulled him from under the wheels," their friends told

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them, as they padded over the cloth-covered carpet in heavy galoshes, trailing the ends of kerchiefs and shawls.

"And now they'll be surprised," he thought, trying to synchronize the flow of his thoughts with the movement of the sleigh and lull himself to sleep.

The other man was thinking about the purpose of their sudden departure, about the reception awaiting them at the other end and about what should be done in the first instance. He also thought that Goltsev was asleep, not suspecting that Goltsev was wide-awake and that it was he himself who was asleep, plunging in his dreams from pothole to pothole together with his thoughts about revolution, which now, as once before, meant more to him than his fur coat and his belongings, more than his wife and child, more than his own life and more than other peoples' lives, and with which he would not part for anything in the world—even in his sleep—once he had laid hold of them and kindled them within himself.

Their eyes opened languidly, of their own accord. They could not help their surprise. A village lay in a deep otherworldly trance. The snow glittered. The three horses had broken file, they had left the road and stood huddled together. The night was bright and still. The front horse, its head raised, was gazing over a snowdrift at something left far behind. The moon shone black and mysterious behind a house tightly swathed in frosty air. After the solemnity of the forest and the blizzard-swept loneliness of the open country a human dwelling was like an apparition in a fairy tale. The house seemed conscious of its awesome magic and was in no hurry to answer the coachman's knock. It stood silent, unwilling to break its own oppressive spell. The snow glittered. But soon two voices, unseen to each other, spoke loudly through the gate. They divided the whole world between them, these two, as they talked to each other through the timbers, in the midst of infinite stillness. The man who was opening the gate took the half which looked North, unfolding beyond the roof of the house, and the other man, who was wait-

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ing for him, took the half which the horse could see over the edge of the snowdrift.

At the previous station Gimazetdin had woken only Kovalevsky and the coachman who had driven them to this point was a stranger to Goltsev. But now he immediately recognized Dementy Mekhanoshin to whom he had once issued a certificate in his office—a good sixty miles from here—to the effect that, being the owner of a *troika* and plying the last stage between Bilyar and Syuginsk, he was working for defense.

It was odd to think that he had certified this house and its coachyard and that, knowing nothing at all of them, he had underwritten this magic village and the starry night above it. Later, while the horses were being reharnessed and the sleepy wife of the coachman gave them tea; while the clock ticked and they tried to make conversation, and bugs crawled sultrily over calendars and portraits of crowned persons; while bodies sleeping on the benches snored and wheezed fitfully like clockwork devices of different systems, Dementy kept going out and returning, and each time his appearance changed, depending on what he had taken down from a nail or dragged from under his bed. When he came in the first time to tell his wife to give the gentlemen sugar and to get out the white bread for them, he was wearing a smock and looked like a hospitable peasant; the second time, coming in for the reins, he was a laborer dressed in a short Siberian jacket and finally he appeared as a coachman in a heavy fur coat. Without coming in, he leaned through the doorway and said that the horses were ready, that it was past three in the morning and time for them to leave. Then, pushing open the door with the stock of his whip, he went into the dark world outside which reverberated loudly at his first steps.

The rest of the journey left no trace in their memories. It was getting light when Goltsev woke and the countryside was covered in a haze. An endless, straggling convoy of sleighs was lumbering by in a cloud of steam. They were overtaking it, and it looked therefore as though the timber-loaded sleighs were

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creaking and swaying without moving forwards and that the drivers were just marking time, stomping their feet on the ground to keep warm. The broad cart-road ran to one side of the track over which they were racing and it was on a much higher level. Legs rose and fell, trampling the still lit stars and there was a movement of hands, horses' muzzles, cowled heads and sleighs. It seemed as though the grey and weary suburban morning was itself drifting over the clear sky in great damp patches towards the place where it sensed the railroad, the brick walls of factory buildings, heaps of damp coal and the drudgery of fumes and smoke. The sleigh raced on, flying over ruts and potholes, its bell jingling frantically. There was still no end to the convoy and it was high time for the sun to rise, but the sun was still far away.

The sun was still far away. They would see it only after another five *versts,* after a short stop at the inn, after the message from the factory director and the long restless wait in his anteroom.

Then it appeared. It entered the manager's office with them, flooded rapidly over the carpet, settled behind the flowerpots and smiled at the caged chaffinches by the window, at the fir trees outside, at the stove and at all forty-four volumes of the leather-bound Brockhaus encyclopedia.

After this, during Kovalevsky's conversation with the manager, the yard outside was alive and at play, tirelessly scattering turquoise and amber, wafts of pungent resin from the sweating pines and beads of molten hoarfrost.

The manager glanced towards Goltsev. "He's my friend," said Kovalevsky quickly. "Don't worry, you can talk freely. . . . So you knew Breshkovskaya"?[3]

Suddenly Kovalevsky got up and, turning to Goltsev, shouted in panic: "And what about my papers? Just as I said! Kostya, now what shall I do?"

Goltsev didn't at first understand: "I've got our passports. . . ."

3. One of the founders of the Social-Revolutionary party.

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"That bundle of papers!" Kovalevsky interrupted him angrily, "I asked you to remind me."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Yura. We left them behind. It really is too bad of me. I can't think how I . . ."

Their host, a short thickset man who had difficulty with his breathing, attended in the meantime to his managerial business. He kept looking at his watch and, puffing and blowing, stirred the logs in the stove with a poker. Sometimes, as though changing his mind about something, he would suddenly stop in his tracks halfway across the room, swivel round and dart over to the desk at which Kovalevsky was writing to his brother: . . . "in other words, all is well. I only hope it goes on like this. Now for the most important thing. Do exactly as I tell you. Kostya says that we left a bundle with all my illegal stuff lying on Masha's suitcase in the hall. Open it up and if there are any manuscripts among the pamphlets (memoirs, notes on the scope of the organization, letters in code relating to the secret rendezvous in our house, to the period of Kulisher's escape, etc.) wrap it all up, seal it and send it to me in Moscow at the office in Teploryadnaya with the first reliable person—depending of course on how things work out. But you know what to do as well as I do and if there is a change of . . ."

—"Do come and have some coffee," whispered the manager with a shuffle and a click of the heels. "I mean you, young man," he explained to Goltsev with even greater care and paused respectfully at the sight of Kovalevsky's cuff which was poised over the paper, waiting to pounce on the needed word.

Three Austrian prisoners of war went past the window, talking and blowing their noses. They carefully walked round the puddles which had formed.

. . . "If there is a change of climate," Kovalevsky found the word he needed, "don't send the papers to Moscow, but hide them in a safe place. I'm counting on you for this and all other things we agreed on. We have to catch the train soon. I'm dead tired. We hope to have a good sleep in the train. I'm writing to

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Masha separately. Well, all the best. P.S. Just imagine, it turns out that R., the manager, is an old Social-Revolutionary. What do you make of that?"

At this moment Goltsev looked into the office with a slice of buttered bread in his hand. Swallowing the half-chewed piece he had just bitten off, he said: "You're writing to Mike, are you? Tell him to send," he took another bite at his bread and butter and continued chewing and swallowing, "my papers as well. I've changed my mind. Don't forget, Yura. And come and have some coffee."

(*Translated by Max Hayward*)

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Evgeny Zamyatin

ON LITERATURE, REVOLUTION AND ENTROPY [1]

Tell me what is the final integer, the one at the very top, the biggest of all.

But that's ridiculous! Since the number of integers is infinite, how can you have a final integer?

Well then how can you have a final revolution? There is no final revolution. Revolutions are infinite.

(from *We* by Zamyatin)

Ask the question point-blank: what is revolution? You get a variety of replies. Some people will answer in the style of Louis XIV: *la révolution, c'est nous.* Others turn to the calendar, giving

1. Zamyatin was one of those few Soviet writers who refused to make compromises or rationalizations in the face of the inherent moral evil of the Soviet dictatorship. Had other Soviet intellectuals followed his (and Pasternak's) example it is possible that Stalin would not have obtained his ascendancy over the nation in 1929.

   Before the revolution Zamyatin was a member of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party. In a short autobiographical sketch published in 1925, he ended with the words, "Then I was a Bolshevik, now I am not a Bolshevik." Like Gorky he had recoiled from Lenin's premature assumption of supreme power; but unlike Gorky, Zamyatin did not subsequently come to terms with the *fait accompli.* His novel *We,* published in Prague in 1929, a forerunner of Orwell's *1984,* foresaw the horrors to come. In "On Literature, Revolution and Entropy," published in Moscow in 1924 and again in 1926, he defiantly asserted the need for heresy in literature as the very condition of its existence. When, in 1929, he was framed together with Pilnyak, he refused to submit, and, apparently with the assistance of Gorky, was able to emigrate to Paris where he died in 1937.

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you the day and the month. Still others spell it out letter by letter. But if we go one stage beyond the alphabet and articulate our answer, this is what we get:

Two dead, dark stars collide with a deafening but unheard crash and spark into life a new star: that's revolution. A molecule breaks loose from its orbit, invades a neighboring atomic universe and gives birth to a new chemical element: that's revolution. With one book Lobachevsky cleaves the centuries-old walls of the Euclidean world and opens the way to the infinities of non-Euclidean space: that's revolution.

Revolution is everywhere and in all things; it is infinite, there is no final revolution, no end to the sequence of integers. Social revolution is only one in the infinite sequence of integers. The law of revolution is not a social law, it is immeasurably greater, it is a cosmic, universal law—such as the law of the conservation of energy and the law of the loss of energy (entropy). Some day an exact formula will be established for the law of revolution. And in this formula nations, classes, stars—and books will be expressed as numerical values.

Red, fiery, death-dealing is the law of revolution; but that death is the birth of a new life, of a new star. And cold, blue as ice, as the icy interplanetary infinities, is the law of entropy. The flame turns from fiery red to an even, warm pink, no longer death-dealing but comfort-producing; the sun ages and becomes a planet suitable for highways, shops, beds, prostitutes, prisons: that is a law. And in order to make the planet young again, we must set it afire, we must thrust it off the smooth highway of evolution: that is a law.

The flame, true enough, will grow cold tomorrow or the day after tomorrow (in the Book of Genesis days are years and even aeons). But already today there should be somebody who can foresee that; there should be somebody today to speak heretically of tomorrow. Heretics are the only (bitter-tasting) remedy for the entropy of human thought.

When (in science, religion, social life, art) a flaming, seething sphere grows cold, the fiery molten rock becomes covered with dogma—with a hard, ossified, immovable crust. In science, religion, social life and art, dogmatization is the entropy of thought; what has

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been dogmatized no longer inflames, it is merely warm—and soon it is to be cool. The Sermon on the Mount, delivered beneath the scorching sun to upstretched arms and rending sobs, gives way to slumberous prayer in some well appointed abbey. Galileo's tragic *"E pur si muove"* gives way to calm calculations in some well-heated office in an observatory. On the Galileos the epigones build —slowly, coral upon coral, forming a reef: this is the path of evolution. Till one day a new heresy explodes and blows up the dogma's crust, together with all the ever so stable, rock-like structures that had been erected on it.

Explosions are not comfortable things. That is why the exploders, the heretics are quite rightly annihilated by fire, by axes and by words. Heretics are harmful to everybody today, to every evolution, to the difficult, slow, useful, so very useful, constructive, process of coral reef-building; imprudently and foolishly they leap into today from tomorrow. They are romantics. It was right and proper that in 1797 Babeuf had his head cut off: he had leaped into 1797, skipping one hundred and fifty years. It is equally right and proper that heretical literature, literature that is damaging to dogma, should also have its head cut off: such literature is harmful.

But harmful literature is more useful than useful literature: because it is anti-entropic, it militates against calcification, sclerosis, encrustedness, moss, peace. It is Utopian and ridiculous. Like Babeuf in 1797 it is right one hundred and fifty years later.

We know Darwin, we know that after Darwin came mutations, Weismannism, neo-Lamarckism. But these are only penthouses and balconies while Darwin is the building itself. And the building contains not only tadpoles and toadstools, it also contains man. Fangs grow sharp only if there is someone to gnaw on; the domestic hen's wings serve only to flap with. Ideas and hens obey the same law: ideas which feed on minced meat lose their teeth just as civilized men do. Heretics are necessary to health. If there are no heretics, they have to be invented.

Live literature does not set its watch by yesterday's time, nor by today's, but by tomorrow's. Live literature is like a sailor who is

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sent aloft; from the masthead he can descry sinking vessels, icebergs and maelstroms which are not yet visible from the deck. You can drag him down from the mast and put him to work in the boiler-room or on the capstan, but that won't change a thing: the mast is still there and from the masthead another sailor will be able to see what the first sailor has seen.

In stormy weather you need a man aloft. And right now the weather is stormy. SOS signals are coming in from all directions. Only yesterday the writer was able to stroll calmly on deck, taking snapshots of "real life"; but who wants to look at pictures of landscapes and scenes from daily life when the world has taken on a forty-five degree list, when the green waves are threatening to swallow us and the ship is breaking up? Right now we can look and think only as men do in the face of death: we shall die—and what then? How have we lived? If we are to live all over again in some new way, then by what shall we live, and for what? Right now we need in literature the vast philosophical horizon, the vast sweep from the masthead, from the sky above, we need the most ultimate, the most fearsome, the most fearless "Whys?" and "What nexts?"

Those are the questions that children ask. But children are after all the boldest of philosophers; they come into life naked, not covered by one single small leaf of dogma or creed. That is why their questions are always so ridiculously naive and so frighteningly complicated. The new people, who are right now coming into life, are naked and fearless as children, and they too, like children, like Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, are asking their "whys" and "what nexts." Philosophers of genius, children and ordinary people are equally wise—because they ask equally stupid questions. Stupid for civilized man who possesses a well-furnished apartment, with a magnificent bathroom, and a well-furnished dogma.

Organic chemistry has blurred the dividing-line between living and dead matter. It is a mistake to divide people into the living and the dead: there are live-dead people and live-live people. The live-dead people also write, walk, talk, act. But they do not make mistakes; only machines produce without mistakes, but they produce

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only dead things. The live-live people are all mistakes, searchings, questions, torments.

So too what we write also walks and talks, but it can be live-dead or live-live. The genuinely live, stopping at nothing, brooking no obstacle or hindrance, searches for the answers to foolish, "childish" questions. The answers may be wrong, the philosophy erroneous —but errors are of greater value than truths: truth is machine-like, error is alive, truth reassures, error unsettles. And even if the answers are quite impossible, so much the better: to ask answered questions is the privilege of minds constructed on the same principle as the cow's stomach which is ideally suited, as well we know, to chewing the cud.

If there were in nature something fixed, if there were truths, all this would, of course, be wrong. But happily all truths are erroneous. This is precisely the significance of the dialectic process: today's truths become tomorrow's errors; there is no final integer.

This (one and only) truth is only for the strong: weak-nerved minds unfailingly require a finite universe, a final integer, they require, as Nietzsche said, "the crutches of assurance." The weak-nerved do not have the strength to include themselves in the dialectic syllogism. True, this is difficult. But it is the very thing that Einstein did succeed in doing: he managed to remember that he, Einstein, with watch in hand observing motion, was also moving; he succeeded in looking at the earth's movements *from outside.*

That is precisely how great literature—literature that knows no final integer—looks at the earth's movements.

The formal characteristic of live literature is the same as its inner characteristic: the negation of truth, that is, the negation of what everyone knows and what I knew up to this moment. Live literature leaves the canonical rails, leaves the broad highway.

The broad highway of Russian literature, worn shiny by the giant wheels of Tolstoy, Gorky, Chekhov, is realism, real life: consequently we must turn away from real life. The rails, sanctified and canonized by Blok, Sologub, Bely, are the rails of symbolism—symbolism which turned away from real life: consequently we must turn towards real life.

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Absurd, isn't it? The intersection of parallel lines is also absurd. But it's absurd only in the canonical, plane geometry of Euclid; in non-Euclidian geometry it's an axiom. The one essential is to cease to be flat, to rise above the plane. Today's literature has the same relation to the plane surface of real life as an aircraft has to the earth: it is nothing more than a runway from which to take off and soar aloft from real life to reality, to philosophy, to the realm of the fantastic. Leave the carts of yesterday to creak along the great highways. The living have strength enough to cut off their yesterdays.

We can put a police officer or a commissar in the cart, but the cart will still remain a cart. And literature will still remain the literature of yesterday, if we drive real life—even "revolutionary real life"—along the well-traveled highway—even if we drive it in a fast troika with bells. What we need today are automobiles, airplanes, winged flight, seconds, dotted lines.

The old, slow, soporific descriptions are no more. The order of the days is laconicism—but every word must be super-charged, high-voltage. Into one second must be compressed what formerly went into a sixty-second minute. Syntax becomes elliptical, volatile; complicated pyramids of periods are dismantled and broken down into the single stones of independent clauses. In swift movement the canonical, the habitual eludes the eye: hence the unusual, often strange symbolism and choice of words. The image is sharp, synthetic, it contains only the one basic trait which one has time to seize upon from a moving automobile. The lexicon hallowed by custom has been invaded by dialect, neologisms, science, mathematics, technology.

There is a rule, if you can call it a rule, that the writer's talent consists in making the rule the exception; but there are far more writers who turn the exception into the rule.

The business of science and art alike is the projection of the world onto coordinates. Differences in form are due to differences in the coordinates. All realist forms involve projection onto the fixed, plane coordinates of the Euclidian world. These coordinates have no existence in nature. This finite, fixed world does not exist; it is a convention, an abstraction, an unreality. And therefore real-

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ism—be it "socialist" or "bourgeois"—is unreal: immeasurably closer to reality is projection onto fast-moving, curved surfaces—as in the new mathematics and the new art. Realism which is not primitive, not *realia* but *realiora,* consists in displacement, distortion, curvature, non-objectivity. The lens of the camera is objective.

A new form is not intelligible to all, for many it is difficult. Maybe. The habitual, the banal is, of course, simpler, pleasanter, more comfortable. Euclid's world is very simple and Einstein's world is very difficult; nevertheless it is now impossible to return to Euclid's. No revolution, no heresy is comfortable and easy. Because it is a leap, it is a rupture of the smooth evolutionary curve, and a rupture is a wound, a pain. But it is a necessary wound: most people suffer from hereditary sleeping sickness, and those who are sick with this ailment (entropy) must not be allowed to sleep, or they will go to their last sleep, the sleep of death.

This same sickness is common to artists and writers: they go contentedly to sleep in their favorite artistic form which they have devised, then twice revised. They do not have the strength to wound themselves, to cease to love what has become dear to them. They do not have the strength to come out from their lived-in, laurel-scented rooms, to come out into the open air and start anew.

To wound oneself, it is true, is difficult, even dangerous. But to live today as yesterday and yesterday as today is even more difficult for the living.

(*Translated by Walter N. Vickery*)

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Sergei Esenin

SOVIET RUSSIA[1]

That hurricane swept past. But few of us survived.
Renewing friendship's ties, we found many missing.
Again I turned my steps toward my orphaned birthplace,
Where I had set no foot for some eight years.

Whom shall I call? Share now with whom
The grievous joy of being still alive?
Here even the windmill—a bird of wooden beams
With just one wing—still stands, cross-eyed.

To everyone here I am a stranger,
And those who knew me once have now forgotten.
A heap of ashes layered with roadside dust
Lies where my father's house once stood.

1. A peasant's son and former shepherd, Esenin was at first an enthusiast of the Bolshevik Revolution. He saw in it the coming of the bucolic, democratic utopia of which he dreamed in his early lyrics. But the terrible reality of the Civil War and industrialization in Soviet Russia soon bewildered the "peasant poet." Profoundly self-destructive in temperament, Esenin yielded to an almost continuous orgy of drugs, liquor and high living. His love affairs, his broken marriages—to Isadora Duncan, among others—and his extravagant escapades made headlines in Berlin, Paris and New York. In 1924, he made a final attempt to accommodate himself to the Soviet world; he returned from abroad to his native village. The experience was hardly a success, as "Soviet Russia," the poem he wrote after his trip, suggests. A year later, the thirty-year-old Esenin cut his wrists and hanged himself.

Although Esenin's verse was scarcely published during the Stalin era, he remains, together with Mayakovsky, the most popular contemporary poet among Russians of all ages.

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Yet life is seething.
Faces throng
Around me, young and old.
But no one's here to whom I'd raise my hat,
Not one whose eyes would give me refuge.

A swarm of thoughts sweeps through my mind:
My native land—yes, what is that?
Is it just a dream?
For here I'm merely a frowning pilgrim,
Issued God knows whence . . .
So this is I!
I, citizen of this village,
Whose only claim to fame will be
That, in this place, a peasant woman bore
A rowdy Russian poet.

But the voice of thought enjoins the heart:
"Think twice! Why feel the hurt?
It is the new light burning
Of another generation in the huts.

You're past your prime already:
Other youths sing other songs.
They may be more interesting—
The earth, not just this village, is their mother."

Ah, native place! What a misfit I've become.
A dry flush colors my sunken cheeks.
My fellows' idiom sounds so alien,
And I feel a foreigner in my land.

I see before me
Villagers in Sunday best
Transact a meeting as if attending church.

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In clumsy, unwashed speeches
They debate their "life."

Evening's here. The sunset sprayed
The greying fields with thin veneer of gilt.
Like calves that huddle beneath a gate,
The poplars thrust bare feet into the ditches.
Wrinkling his reminiscent forehead,
A lame Red Army man with drowsy face
Grandly expatiates upon Budyonny
And the Reds who captured Perekop by storm.

"We gave them hell, we did—this way and that—
That bourgeois . . . the one . . . in the Crimea . . ."
The maples wrinkle the ears of their long branches,
While the peasant women groan into the silent dusk.

Then a band of peasant *Komsomols* descends the hill
And, bawling furiously to the accordion,
Sing Demyan Bedny's agit-verse,
Drowning the valley with their lusty shouts.

What a land!
Whatever made me shout
In verse that I was the people's friend?
My poetry is not needed here,
And I myself, perhaps, unwanted too.

But never mind!
Forgive me, my native place!
I am content with what I did for you.
This day they need not sing my verse—
I did my singing when my native land was sick.

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I'll take what comes.
Accept things as they are.
I'm ready to follow in their steps.
To October and May I'll offer up my soul,
But never surrender my beloved lyre.

I will not pass it on to alien hands—
Not even to my mother, friend or wife.
The lyre to me alone its sounds entrusted,
And sang its gentle songs to me alone.

Flourish, young people! Strong in your bodies grow!
Your life is different, and so is your refrain.
But I, to a bourne unknown, shall go alone,
And for a rebel soul find lasting peace.
But even when,
Upon this whole wide planet,
An end is put to all the enmity of peoples,
And sorrow and falsehood thrive no more,
I still shall praise in song,
With all my poet's being,
This sixth part of the earth,
Which bears the name of Russia.

(*Translated by George Reavey*)

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Isaac Babel

THE JOURNEY[1]

The front collapsed in 1917. I left it in November. At home mother prepared a bundle of underwear and dry bread for me. I got to Kiev the day before Muraviev began to bombard the city. I was on my way to Petersburg. For twelve days we sat it out in the cellar of Chaim the Barber's hotel in the Bessarabka. I got a permit to leave the city from the Soviet commandant of Kiev.

There is no drearier sight in the world than the Kiev railway station. For many years its makeshift wooden barracks have blighted the approaches to the city. Lice crackled on the wet boards. Deserters, gypsies and black marketeers were lying all over the place. Old Galician women urinated standing on the

1. This story is largely autobiographical, as Paustovsky suggests in his reminiscences of Babel which appear in this issue. As a child in Odessa, Babel had endured the pogroms of Czarist Russia; as a young Bolshevik during the Civil War he was witness to the White Army's acts of violence against Jews, described here. During the Civil War and the war with Poland, Babel was a political commissar in Budyonny's cavalry, and, for a brief period, a clerical worker for the Cheka. In "Red Cavalry" and other stories, like "The Journey," Babel described the savagery of war with scrupulous objectivity, making no attempt to draw the moral which socialist realism demands. As a result he was always under attack for "naturalism." Publication of his work ceased altogether in 1937; he was arrested two years later and died in a concentration camp in 1941.

"The Journey," written in the '20's, was first published in an obscure literary magazine, *30 Days,* in 1932. It reappeared in a censored version in a collection of Babel stories published in Moscow in 1957, after his posthumous rehabilitation. The censored passage, which is indicated in this translation, was evidently omitted for reasons of prudery.

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platform. The lowering sky was furrowed with clouds, suffused with rain and gloom.

Three days went by before the first train left. At first it stopped at every verst, but then it gathered speed; the wheels began to rumble with a will, singing a song of power. Everyone was happy in our freight car. In 1918, rapid travel made people happy. During the night the train shuddered and came to a stop. The doors of our car slid open and we saw the greenish gleam of snow. A railroad telegrapher entered the car, wearing a wide fur coat fastened with a leather belt, and soft Caucasian boots. He stretched out his hand and rapped his palm with one finger.

"Your papers. Put them here!"

Near the door, a quiet old woman lay huddled on some bales. She was going to her son, a railroad worker in Luban. Next to me, a teacher, Yehuda Weinberg, and his wife, sat dozing. The teacher had been married a few days earlier and was taking his young wife to Petersburg. All the way they had talked in whispers about new methods of teaching, and then had fallen asleep. Even in sleep their hands were linked, clinging to each other.

The telegrapher read their travel document, signed by Lunacharsky, took a mauser with a slender, grimy muzzle from under his coat and shot the teacher in the face.

A large, stooping peasant wearing a fur cap with the earflaps undone shuffled behind the telegrapher. The telegrapher winked at the peasant who put his lamp on the floor, unbuttoned the trousers of the dead man, cut off his genitals with a knife and began stuffing them into his wife's mouth.

"*Treif* wasn't good enough for you," said the telegrapher. "So here's some kosher for you."[2]

The woman's soft neck bulged. Not a sound came from her. The train had come to a halt in the steppe. The snow-drifts

2. The two previous paragraphs were excised in the censored 1957 version.

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shimmered with an arctic glitter. Jews were being flung out of the cars on the roadbed. Shots rang out like exclamations. A peasant in a fur hat with dangling ear-flaps led me behind a frozen woodpile and began to search me. A cloud-dimmed moon shone down on us. The violet wall of forest was smoking. Stiff icy fingers like wooden stumps crept over my body. The telegrapher shouted from the open door of the car:

"Jew or Russian?"

"Russian," the peasant muttered, feeling me over. "Some Russian! He'd make a fine rabbi. . . ."

He brought his crumpled worried face closer to mine, ripped out the four ten-ruble gold coins my mother had sewn into my underpants for the journey, took off my boots and coat, then turned me around, struck the back of my neck with the edge of his hand and said in Yiddish:

"*Ankloif,* Chaim. . . . Get going, Chaim. . . ."

I walked away, my bare feet sinking into the snow. My back lit up like a target, its bull's eye centered on my ribs. The peasant did not shoot. Between the columns of pines, in the subterranean shelter of the forest, a light swayed in a crown of blood-red smoke. I ran up to the hut. Its chimney smoked from dung fire. The forester groaned when I burst in. Swathed in strips of cloth cut out from overcoats, he sat in a little bamboo, velvet-cushioned armchair, shredding tobacco in his lap. His image was drawn out in the smoky air. He moaned. Then, rising from the chair, he bowed low before me:

"Go away, my good man. . . . Go away, my good citizen. . . ."

He led me out to a path and gave me rags to wrap my feet. By late morning I had dragged myself to a little town. There was no doctor at the hospital to amputate my frozen feet. A male nurse was in charge of the ward. Every day he raced up to the hospital on a short-legged black colt, tethered him to a post and came in blazing, with glittering eyes.

"Friedrich Engels," he would say bending over my pillow,

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his pupils glowing like embers, "teaches the likes of you that there mustn't be any nations, but we say: a nation must exist. . . ."

Tearing the bandages from my feet, he would straighten up and, gritting his teeth, ask me in a low voice:

"Where are you headed? What devil drives you? Why is it always on the move, this tribe of yours? . . . Why are you making all this trouble, why all this turmoil? . . ."

One night the town Soviet had us taken away in a cart—patients who didn't get along with the male nurse, and old Jewish women in wigs, the mothers of local commissars.

My feet healed up. I set out further along the hunger-stricken road to Zhlobin, Orsha and Vitebsk.

From Novo-Sokolniki to Loknya, I found shelter under the muzzle of a howitzer. We were riding on a flatcar. Fediukha, my chance companion who was on the great odyssey of a deserter, was a storyteller, punster and wit. We slept under the mighty, short, upturned muzzle of the gun, keeping each other warm in a canvas den, lined with hay like the lair of a beast. Past Loknya, Fediukha stole my traveling box and disappeared. The box had been given me by the town Soviet and contained two sets of army underwear, some dry bread and a little money. For two days—we were then approaching Petersburg—I had no food. At the Tsarskoye Selo station I had my last taste of shooting. A patrol fired into the air to greet the oncoming train.

The black marketeers were led out onto the platform and the soldiers began to strip off their clothes. The liquor-filled rubber bags in which they were encased flopped down on the asphalt next to the real men. At nine in the evening, the howling prison of the station disgorged me onto Zagorodny Prospect. Across the street, on the wall of a boarded-up pharmacy, the thermometer registered twenty-four degrees below zero. The wind roared through the tunnel of Gorokhovaya Street. A gas light flickered wildly over the canal. Our chilled, granite Venice stood motionless. I entered Gorokhovaya, an icy field hemmed in by cliffs.

The Cheka was housed in Number 2, in what had been the

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Governor's palace. Two machine guns, two iron dogs, stood in the vestibule with raised muzzles. I showed the commandant a letter from Vanya Kalugin, the N.C.O. under whom I had served in the Shuisky Regiment. Kalugin, who was now an interrogator in the Cheka, had written me to come.

"Go to the Anichkov Palace," said the commandant. "That's where he works now. . . ."

"I'll never make it," I smiled in reply.

Nevsky Prospect flowed into the distance like the Milky Way. Dead horses punctuated it like milestones. Their raised legs propped up a low-fallen sky. Their slit bellies gleamed white and clean. An old man who looked like a guardsman went by, pulling a carved toy sled. Straining forward, he dug his leather feet into the ice. A Tyrolean hat was perched on his head, and his beard, tied up with string, was tucked into his scarf.

"I'll never make it," I said to the old man.

He stopped. His furrowed, leonine face was calm. He thought about his own troubles and went on with his sled.

"And so, there is no longer any need to conquer Petersburg," I thought, and tried to recall the name of the man who was trampled to death by Arab horses at the very end of his journey. It was Yehuda Halevi.

Two Chinese in bowler hats, with loaves of bread under their arms, stood on the corner of the Sadovaya. With frozen nails they marked off tiny portions of the bread and showed them to approaching prostitutes. The women went past them in silent parade.

At the Anichkov Bridge I sat down on a ledge below one of Klodt's bronze horses. My arm slipped under my head, and I stretched out on the polished slab. But the granite stung me, struck me and catapulted me toward the palace.

The door of the cranberry-colored wing was open. A blue gas light gleamed over the doorman, who was sleeping in a chair. His lower lip drooped; his wrinkled face was inky and deathlike. Under his brilliantly lit, unbelted tunic, he wore court uniform

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trousers embroidered in gold braid. An arrow, raggedly drawn in ink, pointed the way to the commandant's office. I climbed the stairway and walked through empty low-ceilinged rooms. Women, painted in dark and gloomy colors, danced in endless rings over the walls and ceilings. Metal gratings covered the windows, forced bolts hung from the window frames. At the end of this suite of rooms, behind a table, sat Kalugin with his cap of straw-colored peasant hair, lit up as on a stage .On the table lay a pile of children's toys, bits of colored cloth, torn picture books.

"So here you are," said Kalugin, raising his head. "Hello. . . . We need you. . . ."

I brushed aside the toys littering the table, lay down on the gleaming top and woke—seconds or hours later—on a low sofa. The bright rays of a chandelier played over me in a cascade of glass. My rags had been cut from me and lay in a puddle on the floor.

"And now for a bath," said Kalugin who stood over the sofa. He lifted me and carried me to a bathtub. The tub was the old-fashioned kind, with low sides. There was no water in the faucets; Kalugin poured water over me from a pail. Clothing was laid out for me on the pale yellow satin cushions of the backless wicker chairs: a dressing gown with clasps, a shirt and socks of heavy silk. I sank into the underpants up to my neck. The dressing gown was made for a giant; I stepped on the flapping ends of the sleeves.

"Don't joke with Alexander Alexandrovich," said Kalugin, rolling up my sleeves. "The fellow must have weighed 300 pounds."

We managed to tuck up the dressing gown of Alexander the Third and returned to the first room. It was the library of Maria Fyodorovna—a perfumed box in which gilded bookcases with raspberry stripes were pushed against the walls.

I told Kalugin who had been killed in our Shuisky Regiment, who had been elected commissar, who had gone to join the Whites in the Kuban. We drank tea, and stars swam and

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dissolved in the cut glass walls of our tumblers. With the stars, we ate horsemeat sausage, black and moist. The dense fine silk of the curtains divided us from the world; the sun suspended from the ceiling splintered and shone, waves of stifling heat came from the radiators.

"Hell, we only live once," said Kalugin when we had finished off the horsemeat. He went out and returned with two boxes—a present from Sultan Abdul-Hamid to the Russian sovereign. One was made of zinc, the other was a cigar box pasted over with ribbons and paper insignia. *"A sa majesté, l'Empereur de toutes les Russies,"* was engraved on the zinc lid, "from your loving cousin. . . ."

The aroma which Maria Fyodorovna had known so well a quarter of a century before drifted across the library. The cigarettes, twenty centimeters long and as thick as fingers, were wrapped in pink paper; I do not know whether anyone but the Emperor of all the Russias ever smoked such cigarettes, but I chose a cigar. Kalugin smiled, looking at me.

"We'll chance it," he said, "maybe they weren't counted. . . . The servants told me Alexander the Third was a great smoker: he loved tobacco, *kvas* and champagne. . . . Yet look at those five-kopek earthenware ashtrays on his table, and the patches on his trousers. . . ."

Indeed, the dressing gown I wore was greasy, shiny and had often been mended.

We spent the rest of the night sorting the toys of Nicholas the Second, his drums and locomotives, his christening shirts and copybooks covered with childish scrawls. There were photographs of grand dukes who had died in infancy, locks of their hair, diaries of the Danish Princess Dagmara, letters from her sister, the Queen of England, breathing perfume and decay, crumbling away in our fingers. On the fly-leaves of Bibles and of a volume of Lamartine, friends and ladies in waiting—daughters of burgomasters and state councillors—bid their farewells in slanting, diligent lines to the princess who was departing

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for Russia. Queen Louise, her mother, who ruled over a small kingdom, had taken care to place her children well: she married off one of her daughters to Edward VII, Emperor of India and King of England; another was married to a Romanov; her son George was made King of Greece. Princess Dagmara became Maria in Russia. Far away now were the canals of Copenhagen and King Christian's chocolate-brown sideburns. Bearing the last Czars, this little woman raged like an angry vixen behind her guard of Preobrazhensky Grenadiers, but her blood flowed into an implacable vengeful granite earth. . . .

Till dawn we could not tear ourselves away from this mute, disastrous chronicle. Abdul-Hamid's cigar was smoked to the end. In the morning Kalugin took me to the Cheka at Number 2 Gorokhovaya Street. He spoke to Uritsky. I stood behind the draperies which flowed to the floor in waves of cloth. Snatches of the conversation reached me through them.

"He is one of ours," said Kalugin. "His father is a shopkeeper, but he has broken with them. . . . He knows languages. . . ."

The Commissar of Internal Affairs of the Northern Communes walked out of the office with his swaying gait. Behind his pince-nez bulged swollen flabby eyelids, scorched with sleeplessness.

I was made a translator in the Foreign Department. I received a soldier's uniform and meal coupons. In a corner assigned to me in the large hall of the former Governor's palace, I went to work translating the testimony of diplomats, incendiaries and spies.

Before the day was over, I had everything—clothes, food, work and comrades, true in friendship and in death, such comrades as are found in no country in the world but ours.

Thus, thirteen years ago, began my splendid life, a life of thought and merriment.

(*Translated by Mirra Ginsburg*)

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Konstantin Paustovsky

REMINISCENCES OF BABEL[1]

I Can Guarantee You Maupassants

An issue of *The Seaman* carried a short story entitled "The King." It was signed: I. Babel.

The story was about the chieftain of the Odessa bandits, Benzion Krik (better known as Benya Krik), forcibly marrying off his faded sister Dvoirah to a puny, whimpery thief. The thief was only marrying Dvoirah out of intolerable fear of Benya.

This was one of Babel's first Moldavanka[2] stories. . . . The piece was written tersely and precisely. It hit you in the face like seltzer. Ever since I was a boy, I have felt that certain literary works were a form of witchcraft. After I had read "The King," I knew that a new sorcerer had entered Russian literature and that whatever this man was to write it would never be feeble or colorless. . . .

Babel was brought into the editorial offices of *The Seaman* by Izya Lifshits and I don't believe I had ever met a man who looked

1. In Paustovsky's reminiscences, published last year in Moscow, the novelist tells of his early life in Kiev, where he was born in 1892, and of the small but vivid literary world of Odessa in the first years after the revolution. This excerpt about his friend, Isaac Babel, is noteworthy for its warm sympathy for Jews. Although Paustovsky himself is of mixed Polish and Cossack origin, he is one of those Soviet intellectuals who have recently gone out of their way to try and counter anti-Semitic trends in the Soviet Union. In 1956, Paustovsky courageously defended Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone* at a stormy meeting of the Union of Writers. In this connection, he spoke out against the philistinism and anti-Semitism of the kind of bureaucrat depicted in Dudintsev's novel. In recent years, Paustovsky has been one of the most forthright champions of a more reasonable and liberal approach to literature.
2. The Moldavanka was the bandits' and thieves' district of Odessa.

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less like a writer than Babel. His shoulders were hunched, he had no neck to speak of as a result of the hereditary Odessa asthma; his nose looked like a duck's bill; his brow was deeply furrowed and there was an oily gleam in his eyes. Not interesting at all, he could easily have been taken for a traveling salesman or a dealer. But, of course, only until he opened his mouth. The very first words changed everything. A persistent irony was heard in the fine ring of his voice.

Many people were unable to look at his burning eyes. By nature Babel was a debunker. He loved to catch people off balance and this gave him a reputation all over Odessa for being a difficult and dangerous man.

Babel arrived in our office carrying a volume of Kipling under his arm. When he talked to our chief editor, Ivanov, he put the book down on the table. But he kept looking at it impatiently, even carnivorously, as he shifted restlessly in his chair, getting up and sitting down again. He was visibly on edge. He was longing to read instead of conducting a polite conversation.

At the first opportunity, Babel switched the conversation to Kipling. Writers, he said, should write in Kipling's ironclad prose; authors should have the clearest possible notion of what was to come out of their pens. A short story must have the precision of a military communique or a bank check. It must be written in the same firm, straightforward hand one uses for commands and checks. Kipling's hand was just like that.

Babel concluded his remarks on Kipling with a quite unexpected statement. As he made it, he removed his glasses, which immediately made his face look kind and helpless.

"Here in Odessa," he said, with a mocking glint in his eyes, "we won't produce any Kiplings. We like a peaceful, easy life. But to make up for it, we'll have our home-grown Maupassants. That's because we have plenty of sea, sun, beautiful women, food for thought. Yes, we'll have our Maupassants, that I can guarantee."

I looked out of the window to watch Babel leave our building, his shoulders hunched, and walk off along the shady side of the street. He walked very slowly and, the moment he was out in the street, opened his Kipling and started reading as he went. Now and

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then he stopped to give passers-by a chance to go round him, but he never once raised his head to look at them.

And the people in the street did avoid bumping into him. Some stared, rather bewildered, but they didn't say a word. Soon he disappeared in the shade of the plane trees whose velvety foliage quivered in the liquid Black Sea air.

Later, I often met Babel in town. He was never alone. What we called the "Odessa literary boys" hung around him like flies. They caught up his witticisms and immediately spread them all over Odessa. He sent them off on all sorts of errands, which they carried out without a murmur. If one of them was not zealous enough, Babel would tell him off sharply, and when he got tired of them, he chased them away mercilessly. But the harsher Babel was with them, the more the literary boys liked it; the objects of Babel's ire seemed to thrive on it. But it was not only the literary boys for whom Babel was a god. Older writers too—there were several in Odessa at that time—as well as young Odessan writers and poets had great respect for him. At that time he was, for us, the first really Soviet writer. . . .

I came into close contact with him toward the end of the summer. He was living at Fontan. Izya Lifshits and I had rented a dilapidated little summer cabin there, not far from Babel's. . . .

I saw a lot of him. Sometimes we spent the whole day together on the beach, fishing with homemade nets and listening to Babel's leisurely stories. There was real genius in the way he told things. When he told a story, it sounded even stronger, even more flawless than when it was written. He was very fond of talking about Gorky, about the revolution, and about how he had lived in the Anichkov Palace in Petersburg where he slept on a couch in Alexander III's study. One day he had looked into a drawer of the Czar's desk and found a box of magnificent cigarettes, a gift to the Czar from the Turkish Sultan, Abdul Hamid.

These fat cigarettes were rolled in pink paper with a gilded arabesque design. With an air of mystery Babel gave one cigarette each to Izya and to me. Their delicate odor was wafted over Fontan. Immediately we both got terrible headaches and for a whole hour staggered around like drunks, groping our way along the stone walls as we went.

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It was at this time that Babel told me the strange story of Cires, a meek old Jew.

Babel had moved to the center of the Moldavanka district, renting a room in the apartment where Cires lived with his gloomy, slow-moving wife, Hava. He had decided to write a few stories which would be situated in this Odessa suburb, notorious for its racy way of life. Babel was attracted by the peculiar and unquestionably talented bandits, like Mishka Yaponchik (Mike The Jap, or the Benya Krik of his stories) who was already a living legend. The dreary Cires apartment was as good a place as any from which Babel could study life in the Moldavanka.

Steadfast as a rock, it was an island among the stormy, raucous dives and the deceptively respectable apartments with their crocheted doilies and seven-branched silver candelabra on the chests-of-drawers—places where, under their parents' roofs, the robbers could find refuge.

All around Cires' apartment one felt the presence of daring, armed young men.

Babel explained to Cires that his purpose was to study the Moldavanka district. The old man did not like it at all. In fact, he grew quite worried.

"Oi, Mister Babel!" he said, shaking his head. "Think of it: you're the son of such a well-known papa. And your mamma, she was a real beauty too. I even heard that none other than the nephew of Brodsky himself asked for her hand. So you can see that the Moldavanka is no place for you, whatever kind of a writer you may be. You'd better forget the Moldavanka for, I promise you, no good'll come of it, and if you earn anything at all, it will be a pocketful of trouble."

"What trouble?" Babel asked.

"Do I know what trouble?" Cires said, dodging the point. "Who knows what nightmares a man like, say, Five-Rubles can dream up? And I'm not talking about bullies like Luska Kur and the rest of them. No, Mister Babel, the best thing you can do is go back to your papa's house on Ekaterinskaya Street. And I tell you frankly, I'm sorry already that I rented you that room. But then, how could I possibly say no to such a nice young man?"

Sometimes, from his room, Babel heard Hava nagging at her

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husband in an angry whisper for renting the room to him and letting a stranger into the house.

"What will you get out of it, you skinflint? Perhaps another hundred thousand?[3] But then he'll make you lose your best customers." . . .

The nights in the Moldavanka seemed long. The bleary light of a distant street-lamp fell on the shabby wallpaper that had a vinegary smell. Often from the street came the sound of business-like steps, a shrill whistle and, once even, an actual gunshot followed by hysterical female laughter. The sound came through the brick wall and seemed to be sealed into it at once.

He longed to go back to Ekaterinskaya Street. There, behind the thick walls of his apartment of the fourth floor, it was quiet, dark and safe, and the manuscript of his latest story, corrected and rewritten dozens of times, lay on the desk.

Babel would go up to his desk and stroke his manuscript cautiously as though it were a wild creature which had still not been properly domesticated. Often he would get up during the night and reread three or four pages by the light of an oil lamp against which he propped an enormous encyclopedia as a shade. He would always find a few unnecessary words and throw them out with malicious glee. He used to say "Your language becomes clear and strong, not when you can no longer add a sentence, but when you can no longer take away from it."

Everybody who saw Babel at work, particularly at night, (and this was difficult because he always hid himself away to write) was struck by his sad face and his peculiar expression of kindness and sorrow.

Babel would have given a great deal during those barren nights in the Moldavanka to be able to return to his manuscripts. But as a writer he felt like a soldier on reconnaissance patrol and thought that in the name of literature he had to endure everything: the loneliness, the stench of the extinguished kerosene lamp that caused bad fits of asthma, the sobs and cries of women behind the walls of the houses. No, he couldn't give up.

One night it suddenly occurred to Babel that Cires must be a

3. There was galloping inflation at that time.

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finger man. That was how he made his living. He received a cut for his services and that was why Babel was such an inconvenient lodger for the old man. He was liable to scare off the old man's daring but cautious clients. . . .

Now Babel finally understood Cires' hints about his pocketful of troubles and made up his mind to leave in a few days. He needed a little time to worm out of the old finger man everything of interest he could tell him; Babel knew he had a genius for finding everything out about people, for "gutting" them mercilessly and persistently, or, as they used to say in Odessa, for "knocking their souls right out of them."

But on this occasion Babel was too late. One day, while Babel was out, Cires was stabbed to death in his apartment.

When Babel returned to the Moldavanka he found the militia all over the place and, in his room, the inspector in person, sitting at his desk writing a report. He was a polite young man in blue twill riding breeches. His ambition was to become a writer too. His attitude to Babel was therefore respectful.

"I must request," he told Babel, "that you remove your things immediately and leave this house. Otherwise I will be unable to guarantee your personal safety even during the next twenty-four hours. You must understand that this is the Moldavanka!"

And Babel fled, shuddering at the hoarse howls of Hava, who called down all sorts of curses on Senka's head, and everyone who had, in her opinion, been involved in Cires' murder. . . .

"May Semyon," she shouted, swaying and sobbing and calling Senka by his full name on this occasion, "may he drink vodka mixed with rat poison and croak on his vomit! And may feet trample to death his mother, the old viper Miriam who gave birth to this hellhound and satan! May all the Moldavanka boys sharpen their knives and cut him to shreds for twelve days and twelve nights! I wish, Senka, you may burn in a slow flame and burst in your own boiling fat!"

Soon after Babel learned all the details of Cires' death. It appeared that Cires himself was to blame and therefore not a soul in all the Moldavanka, except Hava, was sorry for him. Not a soul! The fact was that Cires had proved to be a dishonest old man and, hence, no power on earth could have saved him. This is what had

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happened: the day before his death, Cires went to see Senka Flop-Ears.

Senka was shaving before a magnificent mirror in an ornate frame. He squinted at Cires and said:

"So you've got yourself mixed up with a stranger, haven't you, Mister Cires? Congratulations! And now, you know the new Soviet law: if you come to see a man while he's shaving, state your business quickly and beat it. I give you ten words to explain what brings you here, like in the telegraph office. For every extra word, I'll reduce your commission by two hundred thousand rubles."

"You were born, maybe, making such bad jokes, Senka?" Cires said with a sugary smile. "Or maybe it came with practice? What do you think?" . . .

"Come on, tell me what you've come for, you old clown," Senka said, drawing his straight razor like a bow on an invisible violin. . . .

"Tomorrow, one p.m., at the Concordia Workshop. They'll bring four billion."

"All right," Senka answered quietly, "you'll get your commission. Without deductions."

Cires ambled home. He didn't like the way Senka had behaved. Normally Senka never joked when it came to serious business. At home, he shared his apprehensions with Hava. As usual she shouted at him:

"How long do you have to live, how long before you learn any sense? Obviously Senka won't take that job: why should he get his nose dirty for a measly four billion? And you'll make a bagle hole with butter on it, at the most."

"What am I to do then?" Cires groaned wretchedly. "These bandits will drive me crazy!"

"You just go and see Five-Rubles. That one may be interested in your phony billions. At least that way maybe you won't be left with nothing, like a fool."

Old Cires put on his cap and dragged himself off to Five-Rubles' place. The man was asleep in his little garden under a white acacia tree.

Five-Rubles listened to what Cires had to say and answered sleepily:

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"All right, you can go. You'll get your cut."

Old Cires left quite happy, feeling like a man who had taken out a life insurance policy that would be paid in gold. . . .

The next day, Senka and Five-Rubles met in front of the cashier's window of the Concordia Workshop. They looked straight into each other's eyes and Senka asked:

"Would you mind telling me who fingered this job for you?

"Old Cires. And what about you, Senka?"

"Old Cires too."

"And so?" Five-Rubles said.

"And so he won't go on living."

"Amen," Five-Rubles agreed.

Each bandit went peacefully on his way. According to the regulations, when two bandits meet on a job, the job is cancelled.

Forty minutes later, Cires was killed in his home while his wife Hava was out in the courtyard hanging her washing. She didn't see the murderer, but she knew that no one but Senka, or one of his crowd, could have done it. Senka never forgave a doublecross.

That Kid!

Babel's father, a fussy old man, was a dealer in a small depot of agricultural machinery in Odessa. From time to time, he sent his son Isaac to Kiev to buy machines from the manufacturer Gronfein.

In Gronfein's house, Babel met his daughter, then a high-school senior. Soon they were in love.

Marriage was ruled out. Babel, a threadbare student, the son of a small Odessa merchant, was obviously no match for the heiress to Gronfein's fortune. When the matter was first mentioned to him, Gronfein unbuttoned his coat, stuck his fingers into the armholes of his vest and, swaying back and forth on his heels, let out a scornful hissing sound, "F-ss-sss!" thus leaving no one in doubt as to how he felt. He didn't even bother to put his contempt into words. This would have been to honor the puny student too much.

The only thing left for the lovers to do was to elope, and they did just that. Afterward everything developed on Old Testament lines: Gronfein laid his curse on Babel's descendants unto the tenth generation and disinherited his daughter. . . .

But time went by. Came the revolution. The Bolsheviks con-

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fiscated Gronfein's plant. The old industrialist fell so low that he would go out into the street unshaven, without his collar, and with just one gold stud holding his shirt closed.

And then, one day, an extraordinary piece of news reached the Gronfeins: that whippersnapper Babel had turned out to be a famous writer and, just imagine, was on familiar terms with none other than Maxim Gorky himself. . . . It seems that the Gronfeins had made a mistake and it was time to make peace. . . .

Their change of heart was followed by the sudden arrival of Babel's mother-in-law at his Fontan summer house. . . . Apparently unsure that she could clinch the reconciliation by herself, she brought along with her from Kiev her eight-year-old grandson, a boy called Lusya. . . .

The mother-in-law tried hard to live down her past attitude towards Babel. . . . We often had breakfast at Babel's house, and the same scene would occur again and again.

When the boiled eggs were brought in, the old woman would watch Babel very closely and if he didn't help himself to an egg, she would ask in a pained voice:

"Babel," she would say—she always addressed him thus—"why don't you eat your eggs? You don't like them?"

"Thanks, I just don't feel like it now."

"So you don't like your mother-in-law?" she would go on, playfully rolling her eyes. "I cooked them specially for you."

Babel, choking, would bolt down the rest of his breakfast and rush out. . . .

The boy Lusya's ears burned unbearably with curiosity from morning till night, as though somebody were constantly tweaking them. That kid wanted to know everything. He would spy on Babel and on all of us; he was diabolically watchful and there was no escaping his scrutiny. Wherever we might go we would very soon catch sight of Lusya's ears, translucent in the sun, sticking up from behind a tamarisk shrub, or a rock on the seashore. Apparently because of the curiosity which consumed him, Lusya was incredibly thin and bony. His olive-black eyes darted about with uncanny speed. At the same time, he would ask up to thirty questions a minute without ever waiting for an answer.

Lusya was a monstrously tiresome child with a grasshopper

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mind. He was at rest only when asleep. During the day he was continually on the move, prancing around, turning cartwheels, making faces, smashing things on the floor, racing around the garden with bloodcurdling shrieks, tumbling on the ground, swinging on doors, emitting theatrical guffaws, tormenting the dog, meowing, tearing out his hair in temper tantrums, wailing hideously without tears, pocketing dying lizards with their tails cut off, and crabs (which he released onto the breakfast table), begging things, insulting people, stealing fishing tackle—and to crown it all—he spoke in a raucous, hoarse voice:

"And what's that?" he'd ask. "And what's it for? And is it possible to make dynamite out of a blanket? And what would happen if a man drank a glass of tea with sand in it? And who invented your funny name Paustovsky which my grandma can only pronounce after dinner? And could you catch a tram from behind with your fishing hook and pull it back? How would it be if one made jam out of crabs?"

It is easy to imagine how we loved the company of that kid. "That spawn of hell!" was how Babel spoke of him, a blue flame shining in his eyes.

Lusya's very presence made Babel so nervous that he couldn't write. He used to come to our dacha to get relief from Lusya, groaning with exhaustion. He addressed Lusya as "my boy," in such a voice that the lop-eared child's hair would have bristled in terror, if only he had had enough imagination.

The sultry days dragged on but the mother-in-law showed not the slightest sign of leaving. "All is lost," Babel moaned, holding his head in his hands, "this is the end of everything. My skull is humming like a brass kettle, as though that spawn of hell were banging on it with a stick from morning to night."

We were trying to devise a way of getting rid of Lusya and his garrulous grandma. But, as often happened, Babel was saved by an unexpected little incident.

Once I went to pick up Babel in the morning to go for a swim as we had agreed the night before. He was writing at his desk, looking very harassed. As I entered the room, he jumped, and without looking around began to stuff his manuscript into a drawer, almost tearing it in the process.

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"Oof!" he sighed, recognizing me. "I thought it was that kid. I can only work while the monster is asleep."

Babel was holding the indelible pencil he had been writing with. . . .

Then Lusya burst triumphantly into Babel's room. He immediately went for the drawer, assuming that the most interesting things must be hidden there. But Babel skillfully managed to lock the drawer and put the key in his pocket. Then Lusya began to snatch things off the table, demanding to know what they were. Finally he started clutching at the indelible pencil in Babel's hand, and after a struggle, managed to seize it. . . .

We went to the beach. Lusya kept diving in close to the shore and blowing bubbles. Babel was watching him very closely. At one point he seized my arm and said in a conspiratorial tone:

"Do you know what I noticed, back in my room? He broke off the point of the indelible pencil and stuck it in his ear."

"So what?" I asked. "Nothing will come of it," Babel agreed gloomily. "The hell with him then, let him dive to his heart's content."

. . . We were all sitting around the breakfast table and Mrs. Gronfein was working up to her daily performance about the egg. . . . Suddenly Lusya slid from his chair, grabbed his ear and started to roll around on the floor emitting heart-rending howls, and kicking everything within range. We all jumped up. A disgusting, purplish liquid was running from his ear.

He shrieked uninterruptedly, on one horrendous note, and the women dashed around him in circles. The whole house was panic-stricken. Babel sat rigid and looked at Lusya in dismay, while he writhed on the floor and shouted, "It hurts, oh it hurts!"

I was about to announce that Lusya was shamming, that he could not be in pain, that he had simply been diving with a piece of indelible pencil in his ear. But Babel caught my arm under the table and squeezed it hard.

"Not a word," he hissed, "Keep quiet about the indelible pencil or you'll spoil everything!"

The mother-in-law was sobbing. Mary, Babel's sister, was wiping off the purplish fluid with a piece of absorbent cotton.

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Babel's mother demanded that the child be taken immediately to Odessa to see an ear, nose and throat specialist.

Then Babel leaped to his feet, threw his napkin on the table next to his unfinished tea and, red with indignation, shouted:

"You must be out of your mind, mother! What are you trying to do? You want to kill the boy, or what? Do you call those Odessa quacks physicians? They're horse doctors, the lot of them, charlatans, ignoramuses!" . . .

"What am I to do then?" Mrs. Gronfein exclaimed, sobbing pathetically. . . .

"You ask me what to do!" Babel cried angrily. "You, a native of Kiev! Don't you know that you have a world-famous specialist for ear, nose and throat diseases, Professor Grinblat? My advice is to take the child to Kiev. Without a moment's delay!" . . .

And a week later a letter arriver from Kiev:

"Would you believe it?" the mother-in-law wrote, indignantly. "What do you think Professor Grinblat found? He found that brat had stuffed a piece of indelible pencil into his ear, and that's all there was to it. Now how do you like that?"

After the incident with Lusya, we felt that peace was restored. . . . Babel began working hard and I would see him coming out of his room silent and rather sad.

Hard Labor

. . . "I have no imagination," Babel once told me. "I'm very serious about this. I can't invent. I have to know everything, down to the last vein, otherwise I can't write a thing. My motto is *authenticity*. That's why I write so little and so slowly. Writing is very hard for me. After each short story, I feel several years older. Don't talk to me about creative work à la Mozart, about the blissful time spent over a manuscript, about the free flow of imagination! Somewhere I once wrote that I'm rapidly aging from asthma, that strange illness which lodged itself in my puny body when I was a child. But I was lying. When I'm writing the shortest story, I still have to work at it as if I were required to dig up Mount Everest all by myself with a pick and shovel.When I start working I always feel that it's too much for me. Sometimes I get so tired I cry. All my blood vessels ache from the work. I have heart spasms

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when I can't manage a sentence. And how often they don't work out, those wretched sentences!"

"But your prose is so smooth," I said. "How do you manage it?"

"Only because of style. It's style that does it," Babel said and let out an old man's guffaw, imitating someone, apparently Moskvin. "He-he, young man, it's style that does it, it's style that does it. I can write a short story about washing underwear and it will read like Julius Caesar's prose. It's all a matter of language and style. But then, you know as well as I do that this isn't the essence of art, but simply high-quality—perhaps even valuable—building material for it.

"'Just give me a couple of ideas,' as one of our Odessa journalists used to say, 'and I'll try to make a masterpiece out of them.' Come along and I'll show you how I do it. I'm tightfisted and cagy, but dammit, I'll show you." It was already dark at the *dacha*. . . . He took a fat typescript from his desk which was easily two hundred pages long.

"You know what this is?"

I was puzzled. Surely Babel hadn't at last written a long work and kept it secret from everybody? I couldn't believe it. We all know the almost telegraphic conciseness of his stories; he regarded any story longer than ten pages to be overblown and padded.

Surely there couldn't be two hundred pages of concentrated Babel prose in this work. It was impossible. I looked at the first page and saw the title—"Lyubka the Cossack"—and was even more astonished.

"For heaven's sake," I said, "I've read that "Lyubka the Cossack" is a short story you haven't yet published. Have you made a novel out of it?"

Babel put his hand on the typescript and looked at me gleefully. Tiny wrinkles gathered at the corners of his eyes. "Yes," he said, and blushed in embarrassment, "this is my short story, 'Lyubka the Cossack.' It's only fifteen pages long, but here I have twenty-two versions, including the last one, which makes two hundred pages in all."

"Twenty-two versions!" I muttered, quite at a loss.

"Listen!" said Babel, who was angry now. "Literature is not

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potboiling. What's so terrible about twenty-two versions of the same story? You think that's extravagant, do you? But I'm not even sure that the twenty-second version is publishable. I think it could still be cut down. It's this sort of pruning, my friend, which brings out the independent force of language and style. Language and style!" he repeated.

"What I do," Babel said, "is to get hold of some trifle, some little anecdote, a piece of market gossip, and turn it into something I cannot tear myself away from. It's alive, it plays. It's round like a pebble on the seashore. It's held together by the fusion of separate parts, and this fusion is so strong that even lightning can't split it. And people will read the story. They'll remember it, they'll laugh, not because it's funny but because one always feels like laughing in the presence of human good fortune. I take the risk of speaking about good fortune because we're alone. As long as I live you mustn't tell anyone about this conversation. Give me your word. It is, of course, none of my doing that, I don't know how, a demon or an angel, whatever you want to call it, has taken possession of me, the son of a petty merchant. And I obey him like a slave, like a beast of burden. I have sold my soul to him, and I must write in the best possible way. I guess it's an affliction. But if you take it away from me—either my good fortune or my affliction—the blood will gush out of my veins and my heart along with it; I will be worth no more than a chewed cigarette butt. It's this work that makes me into a man, and not an Odessa streetcorner philosopher."

He remained silent for a while and added with a fresh surge of bitterness: "I have no imagination. I have only the desire to possess it. Remember Blok's 'I see an enchanted shore, an enchanted horizon'? Blok reached this shore but I shan't. I see this shore at an unendurable distance. My mind is too matter-of-fact. But I should at least be thankful that fate has put into my heart a longing for that enchanted horizon. I work to the very limit of my powers. I do my utmost because I want to be at the feast of the gods and I'm afraid I might be driven away."

A tear gleamed behind the convex lenses of his glasses. He took them off and wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his drab patched jacket.

"I did not choose my race," he said suddenly in a broken

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voice. "I'm a Jew, a kike. Sometimes I think there's nothing I can't understand, but one thing I'll never understand: the reason for this black vileness which bears such a humdrum name as anti-Semitism." He fell silent. I too was silent and waited for him to calm down and for his hands to stop trembling.

"I went through a pogrom when I was a child and survived. But they twisted the head off my dove. Why? . . . I hope my wife doesn't come in," he whispered. "Lock the door. She doesn't like this sort of talk. And she might easily cry all night. She thinks I'm a very lonely man and perhaps she's right."

What could I say? I was silent.

"So there!" said Babel, bending myopically over his typescript. "I work like a mule, but I'm not complaining. I chose this forced labor myself. I'm like a galley slave, chained for life to his oar and in love with it, with every detail of it, with the very wood polished by his hands. After years of contact with human skin the roughest wood takes on a fine color and becomes like ebony. It's just the same with our words, with the Russian language. You have only to put your warm hand to it and it becomes a living and precious thing.

"But one thing at a time. When I write down the first version of a story, the manuscript looks disgusting, absolutely horrible! It's a conglomeration of more or less successful bits, joined together by the dreariest connecting links, what are called "transitions," but which are really like dirty ropes. Read the first version of "Lyubka the Cossack" and you will see that it is nothing but a futile, toothless prattling, a clumsy assortment of words. It's at this point that you have to get down to work. This is where it begins. I check sentence after sentence and not once, but many times. First I throw out the useless words. You need a sharp eye for that, because language is very good at concealing its garbage of repetitions, synonyms and outright absurdities; it seems to be trying to outwit you all the time.

"After this, I retype the manuscript to see the text better and put it aside for two or three days—that is, if my impatience doesn't get the better of me—and then I check it again, sentence by sentence, word by word. And again I'm certain to find a number of weeds and nettles I've missed. And thus I go on, retyping the text

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each time; I work until I get to the point where, despite the most ferocious scrutiny, I can't find a speck of mud in the manuscript.

"But that's by no means the end of it. There's more to come. When the garbage has been thrown out, I check all the images, similes, and metaphors for freshness and accuracy. If there's no accurate simile, I'd rather go without one. Let a noun live by itself, in its simplicity.

"A simile must be as precise as a sliderule and as natural as the smell of dill. Oh yes, I was forgetting: before removing the verbal rubbish, I break the text up into easy sentences. Use as many periods as possible! I would like to see that rule become a state law for writers! Each sentence is one thought, one image, and no more. So don't be afraid of periods. Perhaps my sentences are too short. This may be partly due to my chronic asthma. I can't talk long-windedly; I'm short of breath. The longer the sentences, the harder it is for me to breathe. . . . I think that a noun needs only one adjective and it must be very carefully chosen. Only a genius can afford to use two adjectives.

"The paragraphs and punctuation must be used correctly, not because of some dead scholastic rules, but so as to have the maximum effect on the reader. Paragraphs are particularly magnificent. They allow us to change the rhythm with ease and, often, like flashes of lightning, they illuminate some particular sight in a quite unexpected aspect. There are good writers who are careless about their punctuation and their paragraphs. So, despite the excellence of their prose, it is obscured by haste and carelessness." . . .

"Yes," I said, "it really is like hard labor. It makes you think twenty times before becoming a writer."

"But the main thing," Babel said, "is not to allow this hard labor to deaden the text. Otherwise it's all for nothing, and will turn into God knows what."

(*Translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew*)

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Alexander Grin

THE MAKING OF ASPER[1]

In the gloomy valley of Engra, near the quarries, Judge Gakker confessed the most extraordinary things to me.

"My friend," began Gakker, "man's higher purpose is creative work. The kind of work to which I have dedicated my life demands ironclad secrecy during the creator's lifetime. The artist's name must remain unknown; more than that, people should

1. Alexander Grin (Grinevsky) was born in Viatka of Polish parents in 1880. As a child, living in this suffocating Russian province, he dreamed of exotic and romantic worlds where men were strong and free. He nourished himself largely on American literature: Poe, Mayn Reid, and Cooper. As a youth he longed to escape the dreary realities of life in Czarist Russia and run away to sea. Unlike Conrad he was not able to get further than Odessa, which nonetheless provided him with much of the romantic material for his works.
A protege of Gorky, Grin became a prolific writer of fantastic tales (much in the style of Gorky's early *"bosyak"* ["bum"] stories), whose action usually takes place in the imaginary country of "Grinland." Because of his exotic plots, his use of Anglo-Saxon-sounding names, and his peculiar "translated" style, he was often thought by his readers to be a foreign author in translation. It is interesting to note that he sometimes appears to anticipate the existentialist trend in Western literature, as in the story translated here.
This totally anomalous Soviet writer died of tuberculosis in 1932. Selections of his work were often reprinted until 1950, when he was posthumously denounced as an "arch-cosmopolitan"; it was said that the Soviet intelligentsia had been infected by him with a disease quaintly defined as "Grinomania." Since Stalin's death he has again been reprinted, and his influence, thanks partly to the efforts of friends such as Paustovsky and other Grinomaniacs, is as strong as ever among Soviet intellectuals of all ages for whom he provides an antidote to socialist realism.

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not suspect that certain phenomena which astonish them are nothing but works of art.

Painting, music and poetry create an internal world of artistic fancy. That is estimable, though less interesting than my sort of creation. I make living people, and this is a lot more troublesome than color photography. Carefully putting the finishing touches on the tiny parts, fitting them together, tidying them up, devising intellectual faculties for the newly created subject and also making sure that it acts in accordance with its status—all this takes considerable time.

"No, no," he continued, noting the unease and distrust on my face, "I'm dead serious and you'll soon see it. Like every artist, I'm ambitious and want to have disciples; therefore, knowing that I shall end my life tomorrow, I've made up my mind to confide to you my method of attaining certain results.

Our earth is parsimonious in originating new forms of plants, animals and insects. I had the idea of extending nature's luxurious diversity by creating new forms of animal life. If each discovery of a new variety of luminous beetle or orchid immortalizes the name of some lucky professor, then how much prouder would I be if I were able—not through crossing, that is nature's way—to alter artificially the characteristics of the species in separate individual specimens, and transmit these mutations to their offspring. I found a sure way, so strange and so infinitely simple that if I let you in on my discovery, you'll surely be amazed. I'm not going to tell you about this, however, so as not to make certain poor animals into amusing oddities, the pariahs of the scientific world; for now they are objects of reverential study which crown their discoverers with fame.

I have created a swimming snail with new respiratory organs; six kinds of May bettles of which one is specially noteworthy for the secretion of an aromatic fluid; a white sparrow; a duck-billed pigeon; a crested snipe; a red swan and many others. As you see, I chose well-known and common species with a view to their earliest possible discovery by the scientists. My

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creations caused a furor; nature was held to be the creator, but I read about the fins on a new snail with a smile and with tender feelings towards these little creatures, whose maker was none other than I. Trying to see how far I could go, I then started to create human beings. I devised three, and released them into life: 'The Veiled Lady,' the 'Poet Teklin,' well-known to you, and the robber, 'Asper,' about whom everybody agrees that he is the terror of the region.

It seemed a pointless amusement to produce ordinary people, of whom there are quite enough. Mine should be able to hold the center of universal attention and make a strong impression, just like famous works of art: the trail conceived and blazed by me must make a deep impression on the souls of men.

I began with 'The Veiled Lady' as an experiment. One day a shapely young lady called on the public prosecutor of the High Court in D. A black veil hid her face. She explained that she wished to see the prosecutor to make secret disclosures relative to the sensational trial of X., indicted for high treason. A servant went in to announce her and returned to find that the lady had disappeared. At the very same moment on that very day, as was later discovered, the mysterious lady came on a similar errand to Senator G., to the Minister of Justice, to the Minister of Defense, to the Police Inspector, and in each and every place she vanished without waiting to be received.

The speculation in the newspapers and in society about this inexplicable occurrence gave me many a pleasant hour. The gutter press shrieked about a Madame K., the mistress of a staff general who was interested in getting rid of the defendant. Others, foaming at the mouth, declared that the lady was the cunning invention of the conservatives, bribed by the Ministry Police in order to smother the scandal. Still others concocted an intrigue on the part of foreign powers, accusing the government of treason and asserting that the Veiled Lady was Prince V.'s morganatic wife, a beauty dangerous to all men, however high the offices they held. Ladies in high society as well as women

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of the demi-monde were slandered in whispered drawing-room gossip; the mysterious lady personified graft, depravity, intrigue, party conspiracy, cowardice and treachery. At last she was universally proclaimed to be Mariana Chen—the ailing sister of Captain Chen—a lady who always fancied herself privy to the truth on any subject.

For three years and in four cities she appeared and disappeared at self-appointed meetings which concerned all kinds of weighty matters of world import. Her face was never seen except once, in a picture she placed in the *Paris Herald* together with a letter in her own handwriting. Here is that picture."

Gakker's tale had stirred me. I began to believe him. It was like an echo in a ravine which allows us to gauge the height of the precipice. Gakker's tale resounded like an echo of human power.

He handed me the photograph; it would be difficult to take a better picture of a face that expressed secretiveness. The gaze of half-shut eyes was steady under a high, proud forehead. The face shone in its pale, hard oval. A finger had, it seemed, only lately been poised against the compressed lips.

"Mariana Chen is a symbol of all the obscurity surrounding any tangled affair that involves a large number of people.

Making the poet Teklin, whose translator I was until his death, was a far more difficult business. As you know, this writer was a man of the people, and the artistic demands made upon persons of natural talent are no higher than the usual ones; being prolific and enjoying democratic sympathies they can generally be sure of great popularity.

In editorial offices a shy country giant began to appear, offering verses presentable enough for an uneducated man; he attracted attention, and within a year he was already writing with marked improvement. Then, after several impressive articles and reviews, Teklin vanished, reporting from time to time that he was in India or Bukhara or Australia, moving with the speed of lightning from one end of the world to the other. Teklin con-

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tinued to write verse of lofty social significance; his 'wholesome' poetry satisfied a broad sector of society, and his fame increased. I began to translate him into all possible languages and I can assure you I attained a reputation as a pretty fair translator.

Teklin recently died of yellow fever in Palestro. Even after he got rich, the poet managed without servants, was a vegetarian and enjoyed physical work."

"You're joking," I shouted, "But it's unthinkable!"

"And, pray, why?" Gakker was sincerely amazed. "Can't I compose bad verse?" He fell silent.

"Yes, Teklin was a fine work of art," said Gakker, rousing himself from his thoughts. "I took great pains with him. But now I come to the one who, to me, is the most interesting of all—Asper. I shall not go too closely into the question of technique. In this example you will see the artist at work on his first draft.

Asper is the idealized robber type—the romantic, the scourge of merchants, a friend of the poor and an object of the platonic love of women who seek heroism wherever bullets fly. Strange as it seems, society, while waging a bitter fight against crime, nevertheless crowns thieves with a peculiar kind of halo, offering with one hand what it takes away with the other. After sleep, hunger and love, man's greatest need is perhaps for the unusual, and writers of all nations and peoples have immortalized the pursuits of robbers in their works: Cartouche,[2] Morgan, Rocambole,[3] Fra Diavolo, Stenka Razin. However much they stink of blood, the man in the crowd is drawn relentlessly towards them as a puppy yelping in fright is drawn to the slowly swaying head of a boa constrictor. It's a tonic for the nerves, so I created the legendary Asper. Roving through the slums where men's

2. Cartouche, 1693-1721, otherwise known as Louis-Dominique Bourguignon, was the leader of a band of robbers. He was broken on the wheel.
3. Rocambole, the adventurer who was the hero of a series of novels by Ponson du Terrail, 1829-1871, called *Les Exploits de Rocambole.*

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faces are overgrown with hair and voices are cracked by drink, I hit on a runaway convict, a dangerous man indeed. I had no trouble, with the help of money, in sending him overseas; he was well-known to the police and his arrest was not to my advantage. Taking someone else's mousetrap but putting my own mouse in it, I made use of his name: 'Asper.' Armed robberies are commonplace in our region and I skillfully exploited them—but only those which were committed without violence or murder. Having created Asper, I then created a gang for him; after each robbery, the victim received a short notice which read: 'Asper thanks you.' At the same time the poorest among the peasants received money from me and notes 'From Asper the generous' or 'To each his own, Asper.' Sometimes these messages were longer. Frightened farmers, for instance, would get the following: 'I'll be coming soon. Signed for Asper—his helper who reveals not his name.' Sometimes these farmers were actually attacked, but whenever the robbers were captured they naturally denied any connection with Asper's gang. This offered even stronger proof of the wonderful discipline imposed by the elusive, and—a trait by now universally acknowledged—courageous bandit.

The daring and effrontery of Asper attracted the keenest attention. It was rumored that he hardly ever showed himself and opinions as to what he looked like differed widely. His victims' imaginations were of enormous help to me. From time to time I would add a little color. For instance, if I saw a peasant traveling all by himself along a road, I'd put on a mask and pass silently by him; the age-old urge to show off would force the poor dolt to tell everything about his encounter with none other than Asper himself. Once I prepared a burnt-out campfire near a small railroad station, leaving two masks, several spent cartridges and a knife nearby on the grass. This was then solemnly declared to have been a bivouac hastily abandoned by the robber.

His good deeds became more and more varied and frequent. I dispatched money to poverty-stricken brides, to widows, to starving workers, and toys to sick children, etc. With each

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passing month Asper's popularity waxed stronger and the police exhausted themselves trying to locate the villain. Whole villages suspected one another of harboring Asper, but it was impossible to follow the comings and goings of this remarkable man. Once, when I had heard that the village of Garrakh was to be put under close surveillance and every one of its citizens searched, following a denunciation by some lying or imaginative individual, I sent a letter to the newspaper *Dawn* in Asper's name. In it Asper certified on oath that Garrakh was hostile to him.

About that time Asper fell in love.

A young lady, R., had taken up residence not far from Zurbagan in her sister's villa. During a stroll in the woods a stone wrapped in a piece of paper fell at her feet. Picking up the object, R., in fright and amazement, read the following lines: 'My power is great but your power is greater. I have loved you long and secretly. Do not worry—although I am hunted and an outcast, in pronouncing your name I become transformed. Asper.' The young lady hurried home. A family council decided that this was the silly prank of one of the neighbors and calmed the perturbed beauty. In the morning they discovered a garden full of roses under her window; the whole area from the flower beds to the window sills was covered with gigantic bouquets. A dagger of blue steel with a mother-of-pearl handle impaled a note on the wooden wall of the house. On the note was inscribed: 'From Asper.'

R. immediately departed for another part of the country, followed by the not unenvious gaze of the ladies in her circle.

Elusiveness is more disturbing than crime. On several occasions the police laid an ambush in mountain passes, on river banks, at fords, in caves and everywhere one might possibly assume Asper to have his secret haunts. But the bandit's supernatural elusiveness, which deprived the police of even the meager consolation of a skirmish or a chase, little by little cooled the ardor of the authorities. Half-heartedly, with no enthusiasm, they took increasingly bureaucratic measures, like a chronically

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ill person who has lost all hope of being cured, engaging in endless official correspondence. Then, full of concern for my brainchild, I sent a denunciation which revealed the location of his permanent residence: a small hut I had built deep in the forest. Cavalry and infantry forces were sent to follow up this clue.

Early in the morning as the pursuers were approaching Asper's hut, shots rang out from the green undergrowth. Robbers were firing from behind the shrubbery. These were blank cartridges I had wired and hidden with fantastic skill in various parts of the forest; when the mounted policemen passed along the only trail in this area they did not suspect that their horses rode over a board concealed underground which pressed a button. I had taken enormous trouble with this. The police raced in the direction of the shots, but found nobody; the robbers had disappeared. In the hut, coals were still smouldering on the hearth. The remains of food on pewter plates, knives and forks, jugs of wine all told of a hasty getaway. In chests under the bed, on the walls, and in one small secret hiding-place several wigs, false beards, pistols and stores of firearms were discovered. On the floor lay a tortoise-shell fan, a belt and a woman's silk handkerchief which were thought to be the belongings of Asper's mistress.

The game has dragged on for six years. Many songs have been composed by young people in Asper's honor. But I am now convinced that Asper must be captured; recently the police have infested the region to such an extent that robbery has ceased entirely. Nothing has been heard of Asper for a year now, and many people dispute his very existence.

I must save him—that is, I must kill him. I shall do this tomorrow."

Gakker rolled back one of the sleeves of his shirt to show me a tattoo. The design was composed of the letter A, a skull and a bat.

"I copied this from the arm of the real Asper," said Gakker, "the police will recognize the design."

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I understand. "You're going to die?"

"Yes."

"But, look, life is worth more than Asper, think of that, my friend."

"I have a special attitude towards life: I consider it an art; art demands sacrifices; furthermore, a death of this kind attracts me. In dying, I shall merge with Asper, knowing, unlike authors who are unsure of the significance of their works, that Asper shall live on a long time and serve as material for other creators, founders of legends about magnanimous robbers. So now farewell, and pray for me to whomever can grant absolution."

He arose and we shook hands. I knew that sleep would not find me this night and walked along slowly. Asper, as a robber, continued to exist for me, despite Gakker's tale. I looked toward the mountains and sensed quite clearly that the bandit was there; hiding, he was lying in wait along the highway and cocking his weapons; my invincible certainty in this was stronger than reason.

"About 11:00 p.m. at the Vul cliffs, in the abyss, the legendary Asper was killed. Holding up a mail stage, the robber, while cocking his carbine, slipped and fell; the postman took advantage of this and shot him in the head. The wounded Asper, rushing through the undergrowth, came to the precipice but could not remain on his feet and hurtled downwards onto sharp rocks scattered at the bottom of the 400-foot void. The disfigured corpse was identified by a tattoo on the left arm and a stiletto with the robber's name on the blade. Details in a special issue."

That's what I read in yesterday's paper, bundles of which were being passed out by hoarse-voiced newsboys. "Death of Asper!" they shouted. I have put this newspaper into a special box of curiosities and sad memories. Anyone can see it if he wants to.

(*Translated by Christopher Bird*)

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Boris Pasternak

M. Ts.[1]

Turning your pocket inside out,
You justly say: Search, probe, and rummage.
I'm far from caring how raw the mist is.
What's done is like a wild March morning.

The trees in fluffy peasant coats
Stand rooted in brown gamboge soil,
Though probably the branches find
This covering difficult to bear.

1. The "M.Ts." of the title is the poetess Marina Tsvetayeva, whose work Pasternak so greatly admired and with whom he became close friends, largely by correspondence. "M.Ts." was written in 1928 when Tsvetayeva was living as an émigrée abroad. In his autobiographical essay Pasternak wrote of his sense of kinship with her: "a similarity of points of departure, tastes and aspirations." When he met her at an anti-Fascist congress in Paris in 1935, she asked him whether he thought she and her husband and children should return to Russia; her pro-Communist family was pressing her to flee the loneliness and isolation of émigré life. Pasternak did not know what to reply. "I was afraid that these remarkable people would have a difficult and troubled time at home," he wrote. "But the tragedy which was to strike the whole family surpassed my fears beyond all measure." The family returned to Russia in 1939. Her husband was arrested and perished in prison; her daughter was also arrested, her son died at the front. Tsvetayava herself was exiled to a small town where she could not find work, even as a charwoman. There, she hanged herself in 1941.

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The dew sets all the branches trembling
As it ripples like merino fleece.
Dew scurries like a hedgehog, shaking
Dry tufts of bristle on its nose.

I'm far from caring whose the chatter,
Floating from nowhere, I catch by chance.
What's done is like a farm in spring
When wrapped up in a smoking haze.

I'm far from caring what the cut
Fashions impose on clothing now.
Like dreams, they'll sweep away what's done,
Cooping up the poet in it.

Then drifting out through many gaps,
He'll seep, as does the curling smoke,
Through all the cracks of this age of doom
Into an alley just as blind.

In wisps of smoke he'll then burst free
From rifts in shattered lives.
His grandsons will say, as of the peat:
"The age of so-and-so's aglow."

(*Translated by George Reavey*)

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Boris Pilnyak

MAHOGANY[1]

The year is 1928.
The town is a Russian Bruges and a Russian Kamakura.[2]

1. Pilnyak (the pseudonym of Boris Vogau), together with Zamyatin, was the object, in 1929, of the first Soviet literary frame-up. Both writers were accused of having published anti-Soviet works in the bourgeois press abroad. Pilnyak's "Mahogany," extracted here, had indeed been published in Berlin in 1929; until this time it had been the standard practice for Soviet authors to simultaneously publish their works abroad to establish copyright. In the case of "Mahogany," the work had been published in Germany without the author's consent. Nevertheless, this was used as a pretext to smash the quasi-independent Russian Writers' Association of which Pilnyak was president. After writing a groveling submission which was never published, Pilnyak was permitted to continue working. He revised "Mahogany" which later appeared, in greatly modified form, in the novel *The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea*. Unlike Zamyatin, who refused to submit, Pilnyak was rewarded for his weakness by arrest in 1938. He was sent to a concentration camp during the Yezhov period. His ultimate fate is unknown but he did not survive imprisonment and, like so many other Soviet writers arrested at that time, he no doubt died in camp.

   By a tragic irony, it appears that Pilnyak intended to give "Mahogany" an anti-Trotskyist twist, in the spirit of the times. He made a political miscalculation in believing that the Bukharin "right wing" line might be followed by Stalin; at the time of writing Bukharin's fate had not yet been decided. Readers may note one curious aspect of "Mahogany," namely, an anticipation of Burnham's "Managerial Revolution."

   "Mahogany," which has never been available to Soviet readers, is a splendid example of the ornamental style which owes much to Leskov, Bely and Remizov. This prose style with its thematic repetitions and its peculiar rhythms was characteristic of the Soviet '20's, and was subsequently denounced as "formalistic."

2. An ancient Japanese provincial town which Pilnyak visited on his travels.

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Three hundred years ago the last Czarevich of the Ryurik dynasty was murdered in this town; on the day of the murder the boyars Tuchkov played with the Czarevich[3]; and the Tuchkov family has persisted in the town to this very day, as have the monasteries and many other families of less distinguished origin. . . . This is the Russia of olden days, the provincial Russia of the upper reaches of the Volga with its forests, marshes, monasteries, manorial estates and a chain of towns—Tver, Uglich, Yaroslavl, Rostov the Great. The town is a monastic Bruges of the Russian principalities, of streets sprouting medicinal camomile, of stone monuments to murders and bygone ages. It is two hundred miles from Moscow, but fifty miles from the nearest railroad station.

The ruins of manor houses and the wreck of mahogany furniture are still to be found here. The curator of the museum walks the town in a top hat, morning coat and checked trousers, and he has grown side-whiskers like Pushkin's. He keeps the keys of the museums and the monasteries in the pockets of his morning coat; he drinks tea in the tavern and vodka in the solitude of his woodshed. In his house there are piles of Bibles, icons, archimandrites' hoods, mitres, cassocks, chasubles, psalters, breviaries, altar-cloths and vestments of the thirteenth, fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. In his study he has some mahogany which once belonged to the Karazin family and on his writing-table there is an ashtray in the form of a nobleman's cap with a red band and a white crown.

Vyacheslav Pavlovich Karazin is a nobleman who once served in the Horse Guards. He resigned his commission about twenty-five years before the Revolution because he was too honest. A colleague of his had got involved in a theft and Karazin had been sent to investigate; he reported the truth of the matter to the authorities, but the authorities had covered up for the thief. Karazin, unable to tolerate this, sent in his letter of

3. This reference to the murder of the Czarevich Dmitry, on the orders of Boris Godunov, identifies the "Russian Bruges" as Uglich.

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resignation and retired to his country estate. He used to travel to the town once a week in his carriage, with two footmen, to do his shopping; with a wave of his white glove he would command the salesmen to wrap up half a pound of caviar, three quarters of a pound of *balyk* and a whole sturgeon; one of the footmen would then settle the bill while the other collected the purchases. A shopkeeper once tried to shake hands with Karazin, but Karazin repulsed him saying, "That is unnecessary."

Karazin wore a greatcoat of the period of Nicholas I and a nobleman's cap. The Revolution had ejected him from his country estate and exiled him to the town, but it had left him his greatcoat and cap; he wore this cap when he stood in queues, now preceded not by his footmen, but by his wife.

Karazin lived off the sale of his antiques; in connection with this business he would call on the museum curator. At the curator's he recognized certain articles which had been confiscated from his country house by the will of the Revolution; he would glance with contemptuous unconcern at these articles, but one day he noticed the ashtray shaped like a nobleman's cap.

"Remove it," he said curtly.

"Why?" the curator asked.

"A Russian nobleman's cap cannot serve as a spitoon," Karazin replied. The two antiquarians quarreled. Karazin departed in a rage. He never crossed the curator's threshold again.

There was a saddler in the town who remembered with gratitude how Karazin, for whom he had worked as a groom in his youth, had knocked out seven of his teeth with a blow of his left hand because he had been too slow about something.

A deep silence hung over the town; the tedium was relieved once every twenty-four hours by the wail of the riverboat's siren and by the pealing of the town's ancient bells—that is, until 1928, when the bells were removed from many of the churches for the use of the Metallurgical Trust. With pulleys, beams, and jute ropes the bells were pulled down from their high perches on the belfries and then, poised high above the ground, they

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hurtled down. As they were moved slowly by the ropes, the bells still chanted their ancient lament. They fell with a roar and a thud, digging holes some five feet into the ground. At the time of this tale the whole town was full of the moaning of these ancient bells.

The most important thing in the town was to have a Trade Union card; there were two queues in the shops—one for those with cards and another for those without them. Rowboats on the Volga were rented to people with cards for ten kopecks, and to the others for forty kopecks an hour. Movie tickets cost some people twenty-five, forty and sixty kopecks, but they were sold to card-holders at only five, ten and fifteen kopecks. A Trade Union card, wherever it was shown, had priority together with the bread card; the bread card and, accordingly bread itself, were issued only to people who had the vote—they got four hundred grams a day; the disenfranchised and their children had no allocation of bread at all. The movie house was situated in the Trade Union park, in a heated shed; the beginning of the performances was announced, not by the customary ringing of a bell, but by signals from the power station which reached everybody in the town at once. The first signal meant that it was time to drink up one's tea and the second that it was time to put on one's coat and leave the house. The power station worked till one o'clock in the morning, but on the occasion of birthdays, "October days"[4] and other such unpredictable festivities at the house of the chairman of the Soviet executive committee, the chairman of the industrial combine and other such high officials, the electric power would sometimes be kept on throughout the night and the rest of the populace arranged for their own celebrations to coincide with these occasions. In the movie house one evening a representative of the ministry of Internal Trade, a certain Satz (or it may have been Katz), though he was quite

4. In early Soviet times, a substitute for christening in orthodox communist circles.

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sober, accidentally happened to shove, as the result of an awkward movement, the wife of the chairman of the executive committee and she, with utmost scorn, said to him: "I am Kuvarzina." Satz, not having been informed of the power of this family, excused himself with an air of surprise and was, as a consequence of his surprise, booted out of the district. The leading officials of the town kept very much to themselves and, with their inborn suspiciousness, were wary of the rest of the population; they conducted public life by means of cabals and year after year they re-elected each other to the leading posts in the district in accordance with arrangements between the different feuding cliques. . . . In view of the shut-in nature of their life, which proceeded in secret from the rest of the populace, the leading officials are of no interest for the purposes of this tale.

The Skudrin house stood by the Skudrin bridge, and the house was inhabited by Yakov Karpovich Skudrin, a go-between in peasant lawsuits, who was eighty-five years old. Apart from Yakov Karpovich Skudrin, there dwelt separately from him in the town his two much younger sisters, Kapitolina and Rimma, and Ivan the outcast, who had changed his name to Ozhogov. More will be said of these later.

For the last forty years Yakov Karpovitch had suffered from hernia and, when he walked about, he supported his hernia with his right hand through a slit in his trousers. His hands were puffy and greenish in color and he would take great pinches of salt for his bread from the common saltcellar and, gritting the salt on his teeth, he would carefully pour back into the saltcellar anything that had been spilled. During the last thirty years Yakov Karpovich had lost the habit of normal sleep; he used to wake at night and pore over the Bible till dawn, and then fall asleep till noon. But in the middle of the day he would always go to the public reading room to peruse the newspapers—no newspapers were sold in the town, for subscription money was short—so the papers were read in reading rooms. Yakov Karpovich was fat, bald and quite grey; his eyes were always running and whenever

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he was about to speak, he always wheezed and puffed for a while. The Skudrin house had once belonged to the landowner Vereisky who had gone bankrupt after the emancipation of the serfs, while performing his duties as an elected justice of the peace.[5] Yakov Karpovich, having served his term in the pre-reform army,[6] worked for Vereisky as a scribe and learned all there was to be learned about legal juggling, and finally he bought Vereisky's house, together with the office of justice of the peace, when the landowner went bankrupt. The house had not changed since the days of Catherine the Great and in the hundred and fifty years of its existence it had grown as dark as its mahogany furniture and the window panes had turned bottle-green. Yakov Karpovich remembered well the days of serfdom. The old man remembered everything—the master of the village in which he had been a serf and the recruitment of conscripts for Sebastopol; for the past fifty years he had memorized the Christian names, patronymics and surnames of every Russian minister and people's commissar, of every ambassador to the Imperial Russian Court and to the Soviet Central Executive Committee; he remembered all the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Great Powers and all the Prime Ministers, Kings, Emperors and Popes. The old man had lost count of the years and he would say: "I have outlived Nicholas the First, Alexander the Second, Alexander the Third, Nicholas the Second and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. And I shall outlive Alexei Ivanovich Rykov!"[7]

The old man had a very nasty smile which was both obsequious and malicious, and his whitish eyes watered when he smiled. The old man was quick-tempered, as were his sons as

5. After the abolition of serfdom in 1861 there was a legal reform providing for the election of law-enforcement officers.
6. Serfs were often required to serve as long as twenty-five years in the army before the Emancipation.
7. Rykov, as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, was the nominal successor to Lenin as head of the Soviet State. He was shot in 1938.

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well. The eldest son Alexander had once—it was long before 1905—been sent to the steamship office with an urgent letter, but he had been late for the steamer and his father had slapped his face with the words: "Get out of here, you scoundrel!" This was the last straw. The boy was only fourteen, but he turned on his heels and left the house, returning six years later as a student of the Academy of Arts. In the meantime his father had sent him a letter commanding him to come home and promising, otherwise, to deprive him of his parental blessing and bestow his eternal curse upon him. The son scribbled "To hell with your blessing!" on this letter, just below his father's signature, and sent the epistle straight back to him. When Alexander entered the sitting-room one sunny morning six years after his departure, his father got up to meet him with a gleeful smile and with his hand raised to strike him; but, grinning cheerfully, the son seized his father by the wrists; he smiled again—his smile glowed happily with strength—and he held his father's hands in a vice. Pressing slightly on his wrists, he forced him down into an armchair by the table, and then he said:

"How are you, papa? Why put yourself out, papa? Sit down, papa!" The old man wheezed, giggled and breathed hard; a wicked look of benevolence came over his face and he shouted to his wife:

"Mariushka yes . . . he-he-he, a little vodka, bring us a little vodka, my dove, a little chilled vodka from the cellar with some nice cold *zakuski*. He's grown, our little boy, he's grown. He's come back our little boy, to our sorrow, the son of a bitch!"

The eldest son, Alexander, was an artist and then came the other sons: one was a priest, another a doctor and the youngest was an engineer. The two younger brothers took after the eldest, Alexander, and their father. Like Alexander they had left home, and the engineer, Akim, had become a communist. He never went near his father and whenever he came on a visit to the

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town, he always stayed with his aunts, Kapitolina and Rimma. By 1928 Yakov Karpovich's oldest grandsons were already married, yet his daughter, the youngest of his children, was still only twenty. She was the only daughter and, in the tumult of the Revolution, she had received no education.

This daughter, Katerina, lived in the house with the old man and her mother, Maria Klimovna. In wintertime half the house, and the second floor, were not heated. The household lived as people lived long before the time of Catherine, or even before the time of Peter—though the mahogany, which brooded in the house, was only of Catherine's day. The old couple lived off their garden. Matches, kerosene and salt were the only products of industry in the house and the old man controlled the use of all three. From spring to the fall Maria Klimovna, Katerina and he tended their cabbages, beetroot, turnips, cucumbers, carrots and licorice, which they used instead of sugar. In the summer one could meet the old man at dawn in his nightclothes, barefoot, his right hand thrust into the slit in his trousers and his left hand holding a long switch, pasturing his cows in the dew and the mist on the outskirts of the town. In wintertime he lit the lamp only in his waking hours and at certain times his wife and daughter were obliged to sit in the dark. At mid-day the old man went out to read the newspapers in the public reading room and there absorbed the names and the news of the communist revolution. Katerina would then sit down at the spinet and practice the hymns of Kastalsky—she sang in the church choir. The old man came home at dusk, ate his meal and went to bed.

The father would wake towards midnight, have something to eat and apply himself to the Bible, reciting aloud from memory. At about six in the morning he fell asleep again. No longer afraid of either death or life, the old man had lost all sense of time. His wife and daughter were silent in his presence. The mother cooked gruel and cabbage soup, baked pies, made scalded and sour cream, and prepared jellied meats from pigs' trotters,

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putting aside the knuckles for her grandchildren[8]—in other words, she lived as Russians lived in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even the food she cooked went back to those days. Maria Klimovna, very old and shrivelled, was a wonderful woman, the sort of woman who is still found in the heart of provincial Russia, together with ancient icons of the Mother of God. Fifty years ago, on the day after her wedding, when she had donned her rich red velvet jacket, her husband said: "What's that for?" She did not immediately understand and he repeated his question: "What's that for? Take it off! I know you well enough without these fiddle-faddles and the others had better keep their eyes off you!" Then he moistened his finger and gave her a painful lesson in how she should brush her hair back from her temples. The cruel will of her husband forced her to put away forever her rich red velvet jacket and sent her to work in the kitchen. Whether her will was broken by his, or whether she was tempered by her subjection to it, she was at all times meek and dignified, silent and sad, but never devious or dishonest. Her world went no farther than the gate and her only path beyond it led to the church and the grave. She sang Kastalsky's hymns together with her daughter. She was sixty-nine years old. At night the old man, who was no longer afraid of life, declaimed aloud from the Bible. Very rarely—every few months or so—the old man would walk to his wife's bed, in the silent hours of the night, and whisper:

"Mariushka, yes . . . ha, h'm . . . yes, h'm, Mariushka, this is life, Mariushka!" He held a candle in his hand, his eyes watered and twinkled, his hands trembled.

"Mariushka, he-he . . . here I am, yes. . . . That's life, Mariushka, he-he!"

Maria Klimovna made the sign of the cross.

"Have shame, Yakov Karpovich! . . ."

Yakov Karpovich put out the light.

8. These bones—*babki*—are used by Russian children for various games.

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Their daughter Katerina had small yellow eyes, which seemed to have been immobilized from endless sleep. All year round freckles sprouted round her puffy eyes. Her arms and legs were like logs and her bosom was as large as the udder of a Swiss cow.

The town is a Russian Bruges and a Russian Kamakura.

. . . . Moscow rumbled with trucks and deeds, with projects and achievements. Automobiles and buildings together hurtled into space. Posters blared in the language of Gorky's GIZ,[9] of the movies and of congresses. The din of tramcars, busses and taxis proclaimed the capital from end to end.

A train was departing from Moscow into a night as black as soot. The hectic glow and roar of Moscow were dying away, and they died very quickly. The fields lay wrapped in black silence and this silence came to dwell in the carriage. In a double compartment of a "soft" carriage sat two men, the brothers Pavel Feodorovich and Stepan Feodorovich Bezdetov, connoisseurs and restorers of mahogany furniture. It was impossible to weigh them up from their appearance. Like merchants in the days of Ostrovsky,[10] both wore frock coats over their Russian tunics and their faces, though clean-shaven, had the slavonic cast of Yaroslavl. Their eyes were vacant, yet shrewd.

The train went on dragging time across the black expanse of the fields. In the carriage there was a smell of tanned leather and hemp. Pavel Feodorovich extracted a bottle of cognac and a silver liqueur glass from his valise; he poured out a glassful and drank it down; he poured out another and handed it silently to his brother. His brother emptied the glass and passed it back. Pavel Feodorovich put the bottle and glass into the valise.

"Are we buying bead-work?" asked Stepan.

9. The State publishing house.
10. Alexander Ostrovsky (1823-86), Moscow dramatist, who in many of his plays described the life and manners of the merchant class.

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"Absolutely," replied Pavel.

Half an hour elapsed in silence. The train dragged time with it, halting it only at the stations. Pavel extracted the bottle and the glass again, drank, poured out some for his brother, and then put them away.

"Shall we give the girls a treat? And are we buying china?" asked Stepan.

"Absolutely," Pavel replied.

After another half hour in silence, the brothers drank again.

"Are we buying so-called Russian tapestries?" asked Stepan.

"Absolutely," replied Pavel.

By midnight the train arrived at a village on the Volga which is famed throughout Russia for its craft in the making of boots. The smell of leather grew stronger and stronger. Pavel poured out a last nip for each of them.

"We're not buying anything later than Alexander the First?" asked Stepan.

"Absolutely not," replied Pavel.

Without speaking a word Pavel Feodorovich hired a cart for forty kopecks to take them to the steamship office.

By midday the steamer arrived in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Russian Bruges. The town sloped down to the Volga with its churches, its citadel and the ruins left over from the fire in 1920, when a good portion of the central part of the town had been gutted. The fire had started in the Commissariat of Food Supplies. Instead of trying to extinguish the fire, they started tracking down members of the local bourgeoisie and put them in prison as hostages. They hunted them for three days—for as many days as the town burned, and stopped hunting them when the fire had burned itself out without any intervention on the part of the fire-brigade or the population. At the hour when the antique dealers disembarked, flocks of frantic jackdaws were wheeling over the town, which was filled with the weird

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groan of bells being cast down from their belfries. It looked as though there was going to be a bit of rain.

Without speaking a word Pavel Feodorovich hired a carriage to take them to Yakov Karpovich Skudrin's at Skudrin bridge. The carriage rattled over the medicinal camomile of the ancient cobbled streets and the coachman told them the latest town gossip about the bells, explaining that many people's nerves had been shattered by the tension of waiting for bells to fall and the thunder of the impact when they hit the ground—the same as happens to inexperienced riflemen who shut their eyes to brace themselves for the report. When the Bezdetovs arrived, old Yakov Karpovich was in the yard, chopping logs for firewood. Maria Klimovna was shoveling dung out of the cowshed. Yakov Karpovich did not at first recognize them, but when he did, he looked pleased and began to smile. Groaning and wheezing, he said:

"Ah, the dealers! . . . I've got a new theory about the proletariat for you!" Maria Klimovna, her hands under her apron, gave a low bow and sang out her greeting:

"Dear guests, a good welcome to you, long-awaited guests!"

Katerina, in a skirt tucked up to her thighs and covered with dirt, rushed headlong into the house to change. From over the housetops, startling the rooks, came the whine of a falling bell. Maria Klimovna crossed herself. The bell thudded louder than a cannon and the window-panes tinkled. It certainly was enough to set your nerves on edge.

They all went into the house. Maria Klimovna went to her pots and pans and soon the samovar sang out at her feet. Katerina came in in her Sunday best and curtsied to the visitors. The old man threw off his felt boots and, cooing like a dove, walked barefooted around his guests, who went to wash up and then sat down side by side at the table, in silence. Their eyes were vacant like those of dead men. Maria Klimovna inquired after their health and laid out an assortment of seventeenth-century food on the table. The visitors put a bottle of cognac on the table. Yakov Karpovich was the only one to talk. He hummed and hawed and

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giggled as he told the Bezdetov brothers of the places to which they should go in search of antiques and which he had noted for their benefit.

"But you yourself won't give in? You're not selling?" inquired Pavel Feodorovich.

The old man, fidgeting and giggling, replied in a whimpering voice:

"Yes, yes, seems so. I can't, no, I can't. I'll not part with my own. I may need it myself. We shall see what we shall see . . . yes, h'm . . . I'd better tell you about my theory. . . . I'll outlast you all yet!"

After lunch the guests retired to bed. They closed the creaking door, stretched out on the feather-beds and silently drank cognac out of old silver cups. By evening they were quite drunk. Katerina sang her hymns all afternoon and Yakov Karpovich lurked near the visitors' door, hoping they might come out or start talking, so that he could drop in and have a chat with them. The rooks departed with the day which they had been busily pilfering all through sundown, and the water-carriers came on their evening round, distributing the darkness. When the guests came down for tea their eyes were quite dead and fixed in a stupefied glaze. They sat down at the table, side by side and in silence. To be within easy reach of their ears, Yakov Karpovich settled himself right behind them. The guests sipped tea from their saucers, lacing it with cognac, and unbuttoned their jackets. A charcoal brazier of Catherine's day gave off its fumes near the dining table, which was round and made of mahogany.

Yakov Karpovich talked, spluttering in his haste to have his say: "I have a new thought for you, h'm, a new thought. . . . Marx's theory about the proletariat will soon be forgotten, because the proletariat itself must disappear: there you have it, my thought! . . . It follows that the whole Revolution was for nothing, a mistake, h'm, of history, because, yes, in two or three generations the proletariat will have disappeared—first of all in the United States, in England and in Germany. Marx wrote down

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his theory in the age of manual labor. Now machines are taking the place of brawn. That's what I think. Before long the machines will be tended only by engineers and the proletariat will disappear. The proletarians will turn into engineers. That's, h'm, what I think. And an engineer is not a proletarian, because the more cultured a man is, the less fussy he is about his needs, and he finds it easier to live with everyone on a footing of material equality, to distribute the goods of this world equally in order to set the mind free. Yes, just look at the English: rich and poor alike sleep in pajamas and they live in the same houses, all of three stories. Just compare how the merchants and the peasants used to live in this country, with the merchants all dressed up like priests and living in palaces. But a man like me can go barefoot and be none the worse for it. You may argue, yes, h'm, that there will still be exploitation, but how can there be exploitation? The peasants who can be exploited because they are like wild beasts, will not be allowed near the machines—they might break them and they cost millions, these machines. Machines are too expensive to make petty economies in wages. You've got to have a man who knows the machine, and one man will do where they used to need a hundred. They'll take good care of a man like that. The proletariat will disappear! . . ."

The visitors drank their tea and listened, their eyes glazed and unblinking. Yakov Karpovich snorted and hawked and babbled on, but he didn't manage to develop his thought to its final conclusion because of the arrival of his brother, Ivan the outcast, who had changed his name from Skudrin to Ozhogov. He was tidily dressed in a fantastic array of cast-off clothing and his hair was neatly clipped. He wore no socks under his galoshes. He bowed politely to the company and sat down silently a little to one side. Nobody acknowledged his bow. His face was that of a madman. Yakov Karpovich fidgeted uneasily.

"And what was it that brought you here, my dear," Maria Klimovna asked in dismay.

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"I've come to see some aspects of the counter-revolution, my dear," replied the outcast Ivan.

"What kind of counter-revolution is there here, my dear?"

"As far as you are concerned, my dear, it is only your way of life which is counter-revolutionary. But you have wept for me, which means that you have within yourself the rudiments of communism. Brother Yakov has never wept and I am very sorry that I did not put him up against the wall, when I had the chance, and shoot him."

Maria Klimovna sighed and shook her head.

"And how's your dear son?" she asked.

"My dear son," Ivan the outcast answered with pride, "is finishing his studies in the university and he has not forgotten me. When he comes on vacation he visits me in my domain and warms himself by the furnace while I compose revolutionary verse for him."

"And his wife?"

"I don't meet her. She manages a Party bureau for women's affairs. Do you know how many managers we have for every two workers engaged in production?"

"No."

"Seven. With seven nurses, the child runs wild, as the proverb says. Your guests, by the way, represent the counter-revolution in its historical aspect."

Glassy-eyed, the visitors drank their tea. Yakov Karpovich, swelling with purple rage, began to look like a beetroot. He went towards his brother, and giving a polite giggle, vigorously rubbed his hands together as though they were very cold.

"Listen, brother dear," said Yakov Karpovich politely in a hoarse voice, "get out of here and go to the devil. I implore you from the bottom of my heart!" . . .

"I beg your pardon, brother Yakov," replied Ivan, "but I didn't come to see you. I came to look at the counter-revolution in its historical aspect and to engage it in conversation."

"And I'm asking you to clear off and go to the devil."

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"I shall not go to the devil."

Pavel Feodorovich Bezdetov slowly turned one glassy eye to his brother and said:

"We cannot talk with cranks. If you don't get out, I shall instruct Stepan to remove you by the scruff of your neck."

Stepan returned his brother's glance and shifted slightly in his chair. Maria Klimovna put her face on her hands and sighed. Ivan the outcast sat on in silence. Stepan rose reluctantly from the table and went towards him. The outcast got up in fright and retreated backwards to the door. Maria Klimovna sighed again and Yakov Karpovich giggled. Stepan stopped halfway across the room and the outcast halted, grimacing, by the door. Stepan took another step towards him and he went outside. Then from behind the door, he said in a begging voice:

"Well, in that case give me a ruble and twenty five kopecks for vodka." Stepan glanced at Pavel and Pavel said:

"Give him enough for a half-bottle."

The outcast departed. Maria Klimovna went out of the gate to see him off and thrust a piece of pie into his hand. Beyond the gate the night was black and still. Ozhogov the outcast walked to the Volga down dark side-streets, past the monasteries and over vacant lots, along paths which he alone knew. The night was very black. Ivan talked to himself, muttering indistinctly. He went down to the brick-works belonging to the Industrial Combine; here he crawled through a gap in the fence and made his way through the clay-pits. Amid the clay-pits was a kiln and it was working. Ivan crawled underground into the hollow of the kiln; it was hot and stifling here and a red light glowed from cracks in the doors of the furnace. Here, on the bare earth, sprawled a band of ragged men with matted hair as thick as felt: these were Ivan Ozhogov's communists who had a pact agreement with the Industrial Combine whereby they fired, without wages, the kiln of the brickworks—the kiln in which the bricks were baked—and in return lived here, near the furnace, free of charge; these were men for whom time had stopped in

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the period of War Communism[11] and they had elected Ivan Ozhogov as their chairman. On the straw beside the board which served them as a table three of the ragged crew lay resting.

Ozhogov squatted down beside them, shivered a little as one does when warming up after being in the cold, and placed the money and the piece of pie on the table.

"They didn't weep?" asked one of the ragged men.

"No, they didn't weep," replied Ozhogov.

They were all silent for a while.

"Your turn to go, comrade Ognev," Ozhogov said.

Two more men with matted beards and moustaches crawled into the clay interior of the underground and, in all their ragged poverty, slumped on the bare earth, placing some money and bread on the boards. Ognev, about forty years of age and an old man already, who was lying stretched out where it was darkest and warmest, crawled up to the board, counted the money and climbed out of the underground. The rest remained lying or sitting in silence, except one of the new arrivals who remarked that they would have to load the barge with logs first thing in the morning. Before long Ognev returned with bottles of vodka. Then the ragged crew moved to the board, pulled out their mugs and sat down in a circle. Comrade Ognev poured a round of vodka; they clinked their mugs and drained them in silence.

"Now I shall speak," Ozhogov declared. "There were the brothers Wright, and they decided to fly into the sky, and they perished, crashing to earth after falling from the sky. They perished, but their cause was not abandoned; men reached for the sky and grasped it, and men are flying now, comrades, they are flying above the earth like birds, like eagles! Comrade Lenin perished like the Wright brothers. In our town I was the first chairman of the Soviet executive committee. In twenty-one everything came to an end. The only real communists left in the

11. The short period (1917-1921) preceding N.E.P. during which there was an attempt at the vigorous application of communist principles.

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whole town are we and the only place left to us is this underground. I was the first communist in the town and a communist I shall remain until my dying day. Our ideas shall not perish. And what ideas they were! Now no one remembers them, comrades, except us. We are like the Wright brothers! . . ."

Comrade Ognev poured out another round of vodka and, interrupting Ozhogov, said:

"I'll tell you, chairman! The great things we did! the way we fought! I was in command of a partisan unit. We marched through a forest for a day and a night, and then another day and another night. And at dawn what do we hear? Machine-guns!"

Ognev was interrupted by Pozharov, who asked:

"And when you use your saber how do you hold your thumb, straight or bent?"

"Against the blade. Straight," Ognev replied.

"That's what they all do. Here, show me on this knife, show me how you do it!"

Ognev took the cobbler's knife which they used to cut bread and demonstrated how he placed his thumb on the blade.

"That's the wrong way!" Pozharov cried out. That's not how I hold it—it cuts like a razor when I use it. Here, I'll show you, you've got it all wrong!"

"Comrades!" said Ozhogov softly, his face wincing with pain and madness. "We must talk of ideas today, of great ideas, and not about saber-slashing!"

A fourth man interrupted Ozhogov, shouting:

"Comrade Ognev! You were in the Third Division and I was in the Second. Do you remember how you missed the crossing near the village of Shinky? . . ."

"We missed it? No, it was you who missed it, not we! . . ."

"Comrades!" Ozhogov again interjected in a voice at once calm and insane, "We must speak about ideas! . . ."

By midnight these ragged men who had asserted their right to live underground in the kiln of the brickworks were already

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asleep in their subterranean shelter next to the furnace. They slept all in a heap, the head of one resting in the lap of another, and rags were their only covering. The last to fall asleep was their chairman Ivan Ozhogov. He had lain for a long time with a sheet of paper near the mouth of the furnace. He lay on his stomach, with the sheet spread on the ground. Licking the point of his pencil, he tried to write verse. "We raised a world . . ." he wrote and crossed it out. "We lighted a world . . ." he wrote and crossed it out. "You who warm your thievish hands," he wrote and crossed it out. "You, be ye lackeys or lunatics," he wrote and crossed it out. The right words did not come. He fell asleep, dropping his head on the scribbled sheet of paper. Here slept the communists who answered the call of War Communism and who had been disbanded in nineteen hundred and twenty-one, men of arrested ideas, madmen and drunkards who in their underground refuge and in their labor of unloading barges and sawing timber, had created for themselves a strict brotherhood, a strict communism, men who possessed nothing for themselves, neither money nor belongings nor wives—their wives had left them to their dreams, their madness and their alcohol. It was very stifling in the underground, very hot and very bare.

Midnight descended on the town, as turgid and as black as the history of these parts.

At midnight, Stepan, the younger of the two antique-dealers, stopped Katerina on the staircase leading to the second floor, touched her shoulders, which were as strong as a horse's, felt them with his drunken hand and said in a low voice:

"Go and tell your sisters . . . you know . . . we'll do it again. They should find a place, tell them. . . ."

Katerina stood there meekly and meekly whispered back:

"Very good. I'll tell them."

Downstairs at that minute Yakov Karpovich was unfolding his theory of civilization to Pavel Feodorovich. On the round table in the sitting-room stood a glass and bronze frigate which had been specially adapted as a receptacle for liquor; dispensed

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through a tap into glasses and thence to human throats, the liquor enabled one to journey on the frigate through the world of fantasy. The frigate was an eighteenth-century object. It was filled with cognac. Pavel Feodorovich sat in silence. Yakov Karpovich fussed around him, strutting like a pigeon and holding his hernia through the slit in his trousers.

"Yes, h'm," he was saying, "what is it then in your opinion that makes the world go round, and civilization and science and steamships? Well, what?"

"Well, what?" Pavel Feodorovich repeated the question.

"Well, what do you think? Labor? Knowledge? Hunger? Love? No! The prime mover of civilization is memory! Just think what it would be like if tomorrow morning men were to lose their memory. They still have their instincts and their reason, but no memory. I wake up in bed and fall out of it, because I know of space only from memory and without memory I am ignorant of it. My trousers are lying on a chair and I feel cold, but I don't know what to do with my trousers. I don't know how to walk—on my hands or on all fours. I do not remember the previous day and since I am ignorant of it, I have no fear of death. The engineers have forgotten the whole of their higher mathematics, and all the tramcars and locomotives are at a standstill. Priests don't know the way to their churches and they remember nothing of Jesus Christ. Yes, h'm! . . . I have my instincts left, and it's true that they're a sort of memory, but suppose I don't know whether to eat the chair or the bread left on it overnight and suppose, when I see a woman, I take my daughter for my wife?"

With northeast winds the alcohol-laden frigate on the table was blowing the cobwebs from Yakov Karpovich's mind. Amidst the mahogany of the sitting-room, this Russian Voltaire and his frigate were relics of the eighteenth century. A provincial Soviet night held sway outside these eighteenth-century windows.

An hour later the Skudrin house was asleep. And then, in the musty silence of his bedroom, Yakov Karpovich shuffled in

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his slippers over to Maria Klimovna's bed. The old woman was sleeping. The candle trembled in Yakov Karpovich's hand. He giggled and touched Maria Klimovina's shoulder, which was as dry and shrivelled as parchment, and his eyes grew moist with pleasure.

"Mariushka," he whispered, "this is life, Mariushka, this is life." The eighteenth century vanished in Voltairean darkness.

In the morning church bells again went to their doom and howled and were smashed to smithereens. The Bezdetov brothers woke early, but Maria Klimovna had got up even earlier and hot pies with onion and mushrooms were served with the morning tea. Yakov Karpovich was still in bed. Katerina looked sleepy. Tea was drunk in silence. The day rose up grey and sluggish. After breakfast the Bezdetov brothers went off to their work. Pavel Feodorovich drew up on a piece of paper a list of all the houses and families they had to visit. The streets lay mute amidst the provincial pavements, the brick walls, the weeds growing under them, the elder bushes in the ruins left from the great fire, the churches and the bell-towers. The silence of the streets was deafened by the whining of the bells and it shrieked when they smashed to the ground.

The Bezdetovs walked silently, side by side, into the houses they visited and their eyes were blank as they looked around.

Vyacheslav Pavlovich Karazin was lying on a sofa in the dining room; he was covered by an impossibly worn jacket made of squirrel fur. The dining room and the combined study and bedroom which he shared with his wife presented the spectacle of an antique shop which had been housed in the cramped quarters of a post office clerk. The Bezdetov brothers paused in the doorway and bowed. Karazin studied them for some time and then he roared:

"Get out! Swindlers! Get out of here!"

The brothers did not budge.

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"Out of my sight, scoundrels!" barked Karazin once more, the blood rushing to his face.

His wife appeared at the shout. The Bezdetov brothers bowed to Madame Karazin and left the room.

"Nadine, I cannot bear to see these rogues," Karazin said to his wife.

"Very well, Vyacheslav. Go into the study and I'll talk with them. You know the situation, Madame Karazin replied.

"They've disturbed my rest. Very well, I'll go to the study. Only mind you, no familiarity with these menials."

Karazin left the room, trailing his squirrel jacket after him. The Bezdetov brothers returned on his heels and once more they bowed politely.

"Show us your Russian tapestries and tell us what you want for the secretaire," said Pavel Feodorovich.

"Take a seat, gentlemen," said Madame Karazin.

The door of the study flew open and Karazin thrust his head out. Averting his eyes to the windows—so that they should not by accident fall upon the Bezdetovs—he shouted:

"Nadine, don't let them sit down! How can they possibly understand the beauty of art! Don't offer them a choice! Sell them only what we see fit to sell! Let them have the porcelain, the porcelain clock and the bronze stuff! . . ."

"We can leave, if you like," said Pavel Feodorovich.

"Oh, just a minute, gentlemen. Allow Vyacheslav Pavlovich to calm down, he's very ill," said Madame Karazin, sitting down helplessly at the table. "Oh dear, gentlemen, we simply have to sell off a few things! . . . Vyacheslav Pavlovich, I beg you, shut the door, don't listen to us, go for a walk. . . ."

In the evening, when the jackdaws had torn the day to shreds and the falling bells had ceased their whine, the Bezdetov brothers returned home and dined. After dinner Yakov Karpovich went out on an expedition. In his pocket he had money and a list given to him by the Bezdetovs. The old man donned his

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broad felt hat, his sheepskin bumfreezer and his leggings. He was going to see the carpenter and the carter, obtain ropes and matting and make all the necessary arrangements for the packing of the purchases and their transport to the wharf for dispatch to Moscow. The old man knew his business and on leaving he said:

"We should give the job to the down-and-outs in the brickworks: they're as honest as the day is long, crackpots though they may be. But we can't. Their revolutionary-in-chief, brother Ivan, would never hear of them doing a job for the counter-revolution, he-he-he! . . ."

The Bezdetov brothers settled down to rest in the sitting room and night was settling on the earth. Throughout the evening people came and knocked furtively on Maria Klimovna's window. Katerina would go out to see them and, fawning like beggars, the people would say: "Your visitors buy all kinds of antiques, don't they?" and they offered old ruble and kopeck coins, broken lamps, ancient samovars, books and candlesticks. These people, who were poverty-stricken in all respects, knew nothing of antiques. Katerina did not allow them to come into the house with their brass candlesticks and proposed that they leave their stuff until the morning when the visitors, having rested, would look at it.

At about eight o'clock Katerina asked her mother's permission to go out for the evening—first to choir practice and then to visit a friend. She put on her best clothes and left the house. Half an hour later Pavel Feodorovich and his brother Stepan followed her out into the rain. Katerina was waiting for them on the other side of the bridge. Stepan Feodorovich took Katerina's arm, and they walked in the pitch dark along a path which ran by the side of a ravine to the outskirts of the town, where Yakov Karpovich's old sisters Kapitolina and Rimma had their house. Katerina and the Bezdetovs crept into the yard like thieves and, like thieves, slipped through the garden. In the depths of the garden stood a solitary bathhouse.

Katerina knocked and the door was half opened. A light

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was burning in the bathhouse and three girls were waiting for the guests. They had covered up all the chinks in the windows with curtains and moved the table to the brick steps in the middle of the bathhouse. The girls were in their Sunday best and they greeted their visitors with great ceremony.

The Bezdetov brothers drew bottles of cognac and port wine, brought with them from Moscow, out of their pockets.

On the table, which was covered with paper, the girls laid out salami, sprats, candy, tomatoes and apples. Klavdia, the eldest of them, produced a bottle of vodka from behind the stove. They all spoke in whispers. The Bezdetov brothers sat down side by side on the brick steps, where an iron lantern was burning. Within an hour the girls were drunk, yet even so they continued to speak in whispers. When people are drunk—and this is particularly true of women—the expression induced by alcohol tends, the drunker they get, to become fixed on their faces. Klavdia was sitting at the table, propping her head on her hands like a man; her teeth were bared in a fixed grin of contempt. Sometimes her head slipped from her hands and then she would tear her bobbed hair, without feeling pain. She smoked one cigarette after another and drank cognac. She was crimson-cheeked and beautiful in a monstrous way. Disgustedly she said:

"I'm drunk? All right, I'm drunk. What of it? Tomorrow I'll be teaching in school again. But what do I know? What the hell am I teaching? And at six o'clock I go to a parents' meeting that I called myself. Look at my notebook here, I've got it all down. . . . So I'm drinking . . . well, what the hell . . . and now I'm drunk. And who the hell are you? Relatives of mine or something? You buy mahogany? Antiques? And you want to buy us as well, with wine? You think I don't know the facts of life, but I know 'em all right! Going to have a kid before long . . . don't know who the father is . . . but what the hell!"

The lips were drawn back from her teeth and her eyes had a fixed stare. Pavel was pestering Zina, the youngest of the girls. She was a short-legged giggly girl with very flaxen hair. Her legs

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apart and her arms akimbo, she sat on a wooden block at some distance from the others. Pavel Feodorovich was saying:

"I bet you daren't take off your blouse, Zina, I bet you daren't undo your brassiere!"

Zina held her hand pressed to her mouth so as not to burst into loud laughter and she replied with a giggle:

"Yes I dare!"

"No you daren't."

Klavdia said with contempt:

"She'll do it all right. Show 'em your tits, Zinka! Let 'em have a good look. Want to see mine as well? You think I'm drunk, don't you? Well I'm not. I've not been drunk since the last time you came. Today I just wanted to get boiled. Boiled, you understand? Boiled, boiled, boiled! So what the hell? Show 'em your tits, Zina! You show 'em to your Kolya, don't you? . . . Want to see mine as well?"

Klavdia ripped at the collar of her blouse. The other girls rushed over to her and Katerina said soberly:

"Klavdia, don't tear your clothes, or they'll find out at home."

Zina had difficulty in standing up. Klavdia caught hold of Zina and put her arms round her. Klavdia kissed her.

"I mustn't tear my clothes? All right, I won't. . . . You show them yours, then. Let them have a good look. We've got no prejudices here! . . . So you buy mahogany?"

"All right, I'll show them," said Zina obediently, and she began to unbutton her blouse in a business-like way.

The fourth girl went outside to be sick.

The Bezdetovs, of course, felt that this was just another deal. Buying and selling was all they knew about.

It was raining outside and the trees rustled in the wind. At this same hour Karazin was having one of his fits of senile hysteria and the down-and-outs in the brickworks, sitting by the furnace in their underground, were praising, with the eyes and voices of the madmen, the year nineteen hundred and nineteen,

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when everything—both bread and labor—was shared in common, when there was neither past nor future, when people lived for ideas and when there was no money, because money was not needed.

An hour later the bathhouse was empty. The Bezdetov brothers went home and so did the drunken women, creeping silently into their beds. A notebook remained lying on the bathhouse floor. In it was written: "Call parents' meeting for 6 p.m. on the 7th." "At the trade-union meeting suggest subscription of month's salary to the industrialization loan." "Ask Alexander Alexeyevich to go through the A.B.C. of Communism again."

In the early morning the bells set up their whine again and carts laden with mahogany of the time of Catherine, Paul and Alexander, lumbered down to the wharf under the supervision of Yakov Karpovich. The Bezdetov brothers slept till noon. By this time a crowd had gathered in the kitchen, eager to learn the fate of their old rubles, lamps and candlesticks.

The town is a Russian Bruges.

About the time of which we are speaking, a couple of days after the arrival of the Bezdetov brothers, the engineer Akim Skudrin, the youngest son of Yakov Karpovich, also visited the town. He did not go to his father's, but stayed with his aunts, Kapitolina and Rimma. Akim did not come on business, it was just that he happened to have a free week.

Kapitolina Karpovna went up to her window. What a backwater it was! The wall of crumbling red brick ran to an ochercolored house with a belvedere at one corner, and to a church at the other; and further on were a square, a weigh-bridge and another church. It was raining. A pig was sniffing at a puddle. A water-carrier came round the corner. Klavdia went out of the gate in shammy leather boots, and a black overcoat that reached down to her ankles; a blue kerchief was tied round her head. With her head bent down, she crossed the street, walked along the crumbling wall and turned the corner on the square. Kapi-

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tolina's eyes, shining brightly, followed Klavdia for some time. In the next room Rimma Karpovna was feeding her granddaughter, the daughter of her eldest child, Varvara. The room was very bare and spotlessly clean; it was very tidy and had that air of having been lived in for many years—it was all that one could expect of an old maid's room. It was furnished with an old maid's narrow bed, a work-table and a tailor's dummy, and there were curtains on the windows. Kapitolina Karpovna went into the dining room.

"Rimma dear, let me feed the little one. I saw Klavdia go out. Has Varvara gone too?"

The two old ladies, Kapitolina and Rimma, came of a long line of much respected townsfolk and they were seamstresses and dressmakers of good standing. Their life was as simple as the life lines on the palms of their left hands. There was only a year between them, and Kapitolina was the eldest. Kapitolina had lived a life of righteousness in the best traditions of her class. She had lived it in full view of her fellow citizens and in full accord with the standards which ruled them. She was a highly respectable member of her class. And not only she herself knew but the whole town knew that all her Saturday evenings had been spent at vespers, that she had passed every weekday of her life stooped over the hems and stitches of shirts and blouses—countless thousands of them—and that never, never had she been kissed by a stranger. But only she knew those thoughts and that pain of the soured wine of life by which the heart is withered. She had lived through all the seasons of her life—childhood and youth and the later years—but never once had she been loved and never once had she sinned in secret. By the standards of the town she was a paragon—a virgin and an old maid whose life had gone rancid in service to chastity, God, and the ways of her fathers. The life of her sister Rimma, who was also a seamstress had taken a different turn. It had happened twenty-eight years before and lasted three years—three years of shame that had clung to her for the rest of her life. It had happened in the day

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when Rimma, already turned thirty, was losing her freshness and sowing the seeds of despair. At that time there was a Treasury official in the town, a good-looking fellow who took part in local dramatics, and a prize swine. He had a wife and children and drank like a fish. Rimma fell in love with him and was unable to resist the consequences of her love. Everything about it was shameful. This love affair was a total disgrace from the standpoint of the local conventions; it was disastrous from beginning to end. All around there were woods where it could have been carried on in secret, but she chose to yield herself to this man one night in one of the main streets, and not once during the three years of her shame did she meet the man in privacy, preferring assignations in a neighboring wood, in the street, in an empty tumbledown house or in a derelict barge. Yakov Karpovich disowned his sister and threw her out of the house, and even Kapitolina turned against her. She was pointed out in the street and ostracized. The lawful wife of the Treasury official used to come and slap her face and egged on the local boys to do likewise. The town, by virtue of all its laws and conventions, sided with the legal wife. Rimma gave birth to a daughter, Varvara, who was the very incarnation of her shame and the witness thereof. Klavdia, her second daughter, was a further witness to her disgrace. The Treasury official left the town and Rimma, now well over thirty, was left with the two small children to live a life of abject poverty and shame. Varvara, the eldest daughter, was now married—very happily married—and had two children of her own, the granddaughters of Rimma Karpovna. Varvara's husband worked in an office and so did Varvara herself. Rimma Karpovna, as the founder of the family, now had quite a large household on her hands. The good woman was now well pleased with life. Old age had shrunk her, but happiness had rounded her out. Small and plump, she had kind, lively eyes. As for her sister Kapitolina, she was completely preoccupied by the life of Rimma, Varvara, Klavdia and the granddaughters. All her chastity and all her decency in the eyes of the town had proved to be

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pointless and she had no life of her own.

"Let me feed the little one," she said, "I saw Klavdia go out. Has Varvara gone too?"

In the provincial backwater outside autumn rain was falling. The door creaked in the hall and a man's boots stamped on the floor to shake off the dirt and the mud. He came into the room and stared round helplessly as do all short-sighted people without their spectacles. It was the engineer Akim Yakovlevich Skudrin and he looked exactly like his father thirty years back. He had come for no particular purpose that anybody knew of.

"Greetings to you, my dear aunts!" he cried, kissing aunt Rimma first of all.

Here was the Russia of the provinces with its autumn rain and its samovars.

. . . Akim had come for no particular purpose. His aunts greeted him with a samovar, some pancakes made in the twinkling of an eye, and all the hospitality of rural Russia. Akim did not call on his father, nor did he visit the local officials. Dying bells whined over the rooftops and the streets bloomed with medicinal camomile. Akim left after twenty-four hours, having established that he had no need of his birthplace and that the town had no use for him. He spent the day with his aunts, roaming in memory with all its vanities, partaking of the dire poverty of his aunts, sharing their thoughts, their cares and their dreams. The arrangement of the furniture was much the same as it had been twenty or twenty-five years ago, and the tailor's dummy, which had frightened him in childhood, frightened him no longer. At dusk Klavdia came home from the school. The two cousins—the difference in age was ten years or so—sat down side by side on the sofa.

"How's life?" asked Akim.

After some small-talk Klavdia told Akim of her main preoccupation. She spoke very simply. She was very beautiful and quite calm. The twilight dragged on slowly into the darkness.

"I should like your advice," Klavdia ventured. "I'm having

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a child. I don't know what to do. I don't know who the father is."

"How do you mean—you don't know who the father is?"

"I'm twenty-four," Klavdia replied. "In the spring I decided to become a woman and now I am one."

Akim was at a loss for further questions.

"I was absorbed not by love, but by myself and my own feelings." Klavdia continued. "I picked different men in order to get to know everything. I didn't want to get pregnant. Sex is a joy in itself and I didn't think of a child. But I am pregnant and I've decided not to have an abortion."

"And you don't know who the man is?"

"I'm not certain who it is. But that isn't important. I'm a mother now. I'll manage somehow and the state will help me. And as for morality, I just don't know what it is. It doesn't make sense to me any more. Or rather, I've got my own morality. I can only answer for myself and through myself. What's immoral about giving yourself to a man? I know exactly what I want and I don't have to answer to anybody. Do I know the man, you ask. I don't want to involve him. A husband's all right when you really need him and when he's not tied in any way. I don't want a fellow who just walks round the house in his slippers and gives me kids. People will help me out—I believe in people. People like you when you've got a sense of your own dignity and when you don't want to impose on them in any way. And the state will help me too. I went with the men I liked simply because I wanted to. I'll soon have a son or a daughter. At the moment I don't give myself to anybody, because I don't need it. Yesterday I got drunk for the last time. I'm just telling you what I think as it comes into my head. I hate myself for getting drunk yesterday, but I may need a father for the child. You ran away from your father and I never had one, or rather I heard nothing but bad of him, and this made me very mad when I was a child and I was angry with my mother. Yet all the same I've decided not to have an abortion. My womb is full of the child. It's an even

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greater joy than . . . I am young and strong!"

Akim found it hard to collect his thoughts. Before him on the floor lay patch-work rugs, proclaiming the poverty of life in a small provincial town. Klavdia was strong and beautiful and very self-possessed. It was drizzling outside. As a communist Akim liked to think that a new way of life was in the making, but the old way was so hallowed by time. Klavdia's view of morality was both new and extraordinary for him, but if that was how she saw things, perhaps she was right. Who knows?

"Have your child then," he said.

Klavdia nestled against him, put her head on his shoulder, tucked up her feet, becoming limp and cosy.

"The body is everything for me," she said. "I love eating, I love bathing, I love physical exercise. I love it when our dog Sharik licks my hands and feet. I get pleasure from scratching my knees till the blood comes. . . . And the life all around us is so vast. I can't make head or tail of it, and I can't make any sense of the Revolution either, but I don't mind. I *believe* in life and in the Revolution and that's all that matters. I only understand the things that concern me personally and I couldn't care less about anything else."

A cat walked over the carpet and, in a familiar movement, jumped onto Klavdia's lap. It had grown dark outside. In the room next door a lamp was lit and a sewing-machine began to rattle. Darkness descended on the world.

That evening Akim went to see his uncle Ivan, the uncle who had changed his name from Skudrin to Ozhogov. The outcast came out of the kiln to meet his nephew. The earth is constantly being churned up in the neighborhood of a brickworks, the roofs of brick sheds are long and low and a brickworks always has an air of ruin and mystery. Ivan the outcast was drunk. It was impossible to talk with him, but he was very, very glad that his nephew had come to see him. Shaking like a dog, he kept his feet with difficulty.

He took his nephew into one of the brick sheds.

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"You've come, you've come," he whispered, pressing his trembling hands to his trembling breast.

He gave his nephew a seat on an upturned wheelbarrow.

"They've kicked you out?" he said jubilantly.

"Kicked me out of where?" asked Akim.

"Out of the Party," said Ivan.

"No."

"No? They haven't?" Ivan asked again and a note of sadness crept into his voice, but he added cheerfully:

"Well, they haven't done it yet, but they will sooner or later. All the Leninists and all the Trotskyists will go. They'll all be kicked out!"

Ivan Karpovich now went into a delirium and in his delirium he spoke about his commune, about his having been the first chairman of the executive committee of the local Soviet, about those awesome years that had gone never to return, about how he had been cast off by the Revolution and was now a pilgrim among men, enjoining them to weep, remember and love; he spoke again of his commune with its brotherhood and equality. Communism, he affirmed, was above all a matter of love, of solicitude for others, of friendship, fellowship and labor done in common. Communism meant the renunciation of material things and true communism was love and, above all, respect for one's fellow men. The neat little man shivered in the wind and fingered the collar of his jacket with his thin, trembling hands. The yard of the brickworks proclaimed havoc and destruction. The engineer Akim Skudrin was flesh of the flesh of Ivan Ozhogov . . . beggars and tramps, wandering cripples and vagabond monks, the feeble-minded and the halt and the lame, prophets and seers and holy madmen—these were the leaven of life in the Holy Russia which has gone forever, a brotherhood in Christ which prayed for the world. The man who stood before the engineer Akim was a beggar and an outcast, a holy fool of Soviet Russia who prayed for the world, for justice and for communism. Uncle Ivan was probably deranged. His particular point of lun-

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acy was to walk the town calling on people he knew and on strangers, urging them to weep. He delivered wild and fiery speeches on communism as a result of which many people in the marketplaces did indeed weep. He visited the local officials in their offices and it was rumored in the town that on these occasions the officials smeared their eyes with onion in order to win, through this outcast from the brickworks, the popularity which they so sorely needed. Ivan was frightened of churches but not of priests and he cursed them to their faces. His slogans were the most left-wing in the town. He was respected, as it has always been the custom in Russia throughout the centuries to respect those holy fools out of whose mouths speak truth and justice and who, for the sake of truth and justice, are prepared to lay down their lives. Ivan drank, destroying himself with alcohol. He had gathered round him men of his own kind: men who had been created by the Revolution only to be rejected by it. They had taken refuge underground and they practiced true communism, brotherhood, equality and fellowship. Each of them had his own particular madness: one wanted to enter into correspondence with the proletarians of Mars, another proposed that all the full-grown fish in the Volga should be caught and steel bridges built over the river out of the proceeds of their sale, while a third man had a bee in his bonnet about constructing a tramcar system.

"Weep!" said Ivan.

Akim, lost in his thoughts, did not at first understand.

"What do you say?" he asked.

"Weep, Akim, weep this very minute for the communism that is lost!" Ivan shouted, pressing his hands to his breast and lowering his head as though in prayer.

"Yes, yes, I am weeping, Uncle Ivan," said Akim.

Akim was a tall, strong and hulking man. He came up close to his uncle and kissed him.

The rain lashed down. The murky brickworks proclaimed havoc and destruction.

(*Translated by Max Hayward*)

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Mikhail Zoshchenko

BEFORE SUNRISE[1]

"If I'd been a friend of luck, I vow
I certainly wouldn't be doing this now."

House of the Arts

This house is on the corner of the Moika Canal and the Nevsky Prospect.

1. In 1946, Zoshchenko, together with Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak, were denounced for infringing the canons of socialist realism laid down by A. A. Zhdanov at the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. They were accused of writing works devoid of political and ideological content, and of demoralizing Soviet youth by their pessimism. The journals in which they had published their works during the war (*Zvezda* and *Leningrad*) were the subject of a special decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The head of the Soviet Union of Writers at that time, N. Tikhonov, together with the editors of these journals, lost their jobs. One of the works mentioned in the decree was Zoshchenko's "Before Sunrise." It had been published in two installments in *October*, in 1943; the rest never appeared.
"Before Sunrise" is an exercise in self-analysis—unique in Russian literature—that Zoshchenko attempted by writing down the most vivid and compelling episodes in his life until 1926. Explicitly under the influence of Freud, the humorist hoped in this way to find some clue to his own relentless unhappiness. He regarded the episodes he describes as "snapshots," which explains their partial incoherence.
In this first installment, excerpted here, Zoshchenko describes his checkered career in the immediate post-revolutionary years. Besides a brief spell as a detective, mentioned here, he was successively: a carpenter, a telephone operator, a shoemaker's assistant, a militiaman, a gambler, and an actor.
Zoshchenko died in 1958, apparently unforgiven, unrepentant and unhonored.

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I walk up and down a corridor waiting for the literary evening to start.

The fact that I'm an inspector in the criminal investigation department means nothing. I already have two critical articles and four stories to my credit. And they have all been very well received.

I walk along the corridor and look at the writers.

Here comes A. M. Remizov. He's small and ugly like a monkey. His secretary is with him. A cloth tail sticks out from under the secretary's jacket. It's a symbol. Remizov is the Dean of the "Free Monkey Parliament." E. I. Zamyatin's standing over there. His face is rather shiny. He's smiling. He's holding a long cigarette in a long elegant holder.

He's talking to someone in English.

Here's Shklovsky. He's wearing a central-Asian skull-cap. He has an intelligent and impudent face. He's arguing vehemently with someone. He can't see anyone but himself and his adversary.

I say hello to Zamyatin.

Turning towards me, he says:

"Blok's here. You wanted to see him. . . ."

Zamyatin and I go into a dingy room.

A man is standing by the window. He has a deeply tanned face, a high forehead and light, wavy, almost curly hair.

He's standing surprisingly still. He's looking at the lights of the Nevsky Prospect. He doesn't turn round when we go in.

"Alexander Alexandrovich," says Zamyatin.

I have never seen such empty, lifeless eyes. I never thought that a face could express such sadness and apathy.

Turning slowly round, Blok looks at us.

Blok holds out his hand—it is limp and lifeless.

I feel awkward at having disturbed a man lost in his oblivion. . . . I mumble an apology.

Blok asks me in a rather dull voice:

"Will you be speaking at the evening?"

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"No," I say. "I've come to listen to the others."

Apologizing once again, I leave hurriedly.

Zamyatin is left with Blok.

Again I walk along the corridor. An emotion is stifling me. I almost know my fate now. I see the finale of my life. I see the misery which will inevitably stifle me.

I ask someone: "How old is Blok?" I receive the answer: "About forty."

Fancy, not yet forty! But Byron was thirty when he said:

> It is that weariness which springs
> From all I meet, or hear or see?
> To me no pleasure Beauty brings
> Thine eyes have scarce a charm for me . . .

Byron did not put a question mark at the end of the second line. It is I who am mentally asking the question. I wonder whether this is really "that weariness." The literary evening begins.

The Cafe "Twelve"

This cafe is at 12 Sadovaya Street. I sit there at a table with my friends.

Drunken shouting, noise and tobacco smoke all around me.

A violin is playing.

I mutter Blok's verse:

> I will again befriend the tavern fiddle . . .
> I will again drink wine . . .
> I still won't have the strength to reach the end
> With a sober, sad smile, beyond which
> Is the terror of the grave, the anxiety of a corpse . . .

A man comes to our table, walking uncertainly. He's wearing a black velvet blouse. There is a large white muslin bow on his chest.

His face is smeared with powder.

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His lips are made up and his eyebrows penciled.

On his face is a smile—a drunken and rather embarrassed smile. Someone says:

"Seryozha, come and sit with us."

Now I see it is Esenin.

He sits down heavily at our table. He looks angrily at one of the drunks. He mutters:

"I'll push your face in . . . get out . . ."

I pat Esenin's hand. He calms down. He smiles again sadly, and with embarrassment.

Behind the made-up mouth I see pale lips.

Someone else comes over to our table.

Someone shouts: "We must put the tables together."

They start moving the tables.

I go outside.

At Gorky's

We go into the kitchen. On the stove are large copper saucepans.

We go through the kitchen into the dining room.

Gorky comes towards us.

There is something elegant in his noiseless walk and in his movements and gestures.

He doesn't smile as a host ought to, but his face is friendly.

He sits down at the table in the dining room. We settle down on chairs and on a low brightly-colored divan. I see Fedin, Vsevolod Ivanov in a soldier's great coat, Slonimsky and Gruzdev. . . .

Coughing from time to time, Gorky talks about literature, the people, and the tasks of a writer.

He speaks in an interesting and even absorbing way. But I hardly listen to him. I watch him drumming his fingers nervously on the table, and almost imperceptibly smiling to himself. I watch his amazing face—a clever, rather coarse and far from simple face.

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I look at this great man who has become a legendary figure. It's probably bad, disconcerting and tiring to be one. I wouldn't like it.

As though answering my thought, Gorky says that by no means everyone knows him; a few days before he was traveling by car when some guards stopped him. He told them he was Gorky, but one of them said: "We don't care whether you're Gorky[2] or sweet. Show your pass."

Gorky smiles faintly. Then he starts talking again about literature, the people and culture.

Someone behind is writing down everything he says.

We get up. We say good-bye.

With his hand barely touching my shoulder, Gorky asks:

"Why do you look so glum and grim? Why?"

In reply I mumble something about my heart.

"That's bad," says Gorky. "You must get better . . . come and see me in a few days—we'll talk about your affairs."

We go through the kitchen again. We go out onto the stairs.

We go out into the Kronversky Prospect—the Gorky Prospect.

An Encounter

I go up and down endless stairways. I am holding a file containing papers and forms. I write down information about the tenants on these forms. It's a national census.

I undertook this work to find out how people live.

I only believe what I see. Like Harun-al-Rashid I go to other people's houses. I go along corridors, through kitchens, into rooms. I see dull electric lights, tattered wall paper, washing on the line, ghastly crowding, garbage and rags. Yes, of course, it is only recently that the difficult years, famine and devastation passed . . . but I didn't expect to see what I've seen.

I enter a dingy room. A man is lying on a bunk on a dirty

2. Gorky means "bitter" in Russian.

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mattress. He is not friendly. He does not even turn towards me. He stares at the ceiling.

"Where do you work?" I ask.

"Only asses and horses work" he says. "I don't work myself and don't intend to. So write that down on your lousy papers . . . you can add that I go to the club and play cards. . . ."

He's annoyed. Perhaps he's sick. I want to go on to the neighbors. As I leave, I look at him. I've seen him somewhere before.

"Alyosha!" I say.

He sits up on the bunk. He has an unshaven, gloomy face.

I see before me Alyosha N., a school friend. He was one grade ahead of me. He was a sissy, a teacher's pet, first in the class and a mommy's darling. . . .

"What happened, Alyosha?" I mutter.

"Absolutely nothing happened," he says. And I see annoyance on his face.

"Maybe I can help you?"

"I need absolutely nothing," he says. "Incidentally, if you have any money, give me five rubles, I'll run down to the club."

I offer much more, but he takes only five.

A few minutes later I'm sitting on his bunk and we're talking as we used to ten years before.

"Really a very commonplace business," he says. "My wife went off with some heel. I began drinking. I drank everything I had. I lost my job. I began playing cards at the club, and now, you understand, I don't want to go back to the past. I could, but I don't want to. Everything is rubbish, rot, comedy, nonsense, smoke. . . ."

I make him promise to visit me.

At Night

There are letters to the *Red Gazette* on my pillow. They are complaints about inefficiency in the public baths. I am supposed to write a *feuilleton* about it.

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I scan through the letters. They are inept and comic. But at the same time serious. They certainly are! The issue concerns an important aspect of everyday life—baths.

I draft an outline and start writing.

Even the first few lines amuse me. I laugh. I laugh louder and louder. I finally roar with laughter to such an extent that the pencil and pad drop from my hands.

I start writing again. And again I'm convulsed with laughter.

No, later on, when I'm rewriting the story, I shan't laugh so loudly. But the first draft always amuses me to an incredible degree.

I feel sick with laughter.

A neighbor knocks on the wall. He's an accountant. He has to get up early tomorrow. I'm preventing him from sleeping. Tonight he's pounding with his fist. I must have wakened him. Annoying.

I call out:

"Sorry, Pyotr Alexeyevich. . . ."

I take up the pad again. Again I laugh, this time with my face in a pillow.

Twenty minutes later the story is complete. A pity I wrote it so quickly.

I go across to the desk and copy out the story in nice, neat handwriting. While copying it out, I continue to laugh quietly. But tomorrow, when I'm reading the story to the editors, I shan't be laughing. I shall read it glumly and even grimly.

Two a.m. I go to bed. But for a long time I can't sleep. I think up subjects for new stories.

Dawn. I take bromide in order to sleep.

More Rubbish Again

The editorial office of the literary journal *Contemporary*.

I gave five of my best little stories to this magazine, and now I've come for the answer.

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Sitting in front of me is one of the editors—the poet M. Kuzmin. He is affectedly polite. Much too much so. But I see from his face he's about to tell me something unpleasant.

He hesitates. I come to his rescue.

"My stories probably aren't what you need for the magazine," I say.

He says: "Ours is a big magazine, you see . . . and your stories . . . no . . . they're very funny and amusing . . . but they're written . . . well, its . . ."

"Rubbish, do you mean?" I ask him. And the comment written on a school essay—'rubbish'—lights up in my mind.

Kuzmin spreads his hands.

"For heaven's sake. I don't mean that at all. On the contrary. Your stories show great talent . . . but you must agree they're rather exaggerated."

"They're not exaggerated," I say.

"Well, just take the language. . . ."

"The language isn't overdone. It's the syntax of the street . . . of the people. . . . I may have exaggerated a little to make it more satirical, to make it critical. . . ."

"Don't let's argue," he says softly. "Give us an ordinary novel or story of yours . . . and believe me, we rate your work very highly."

I leave the editorial office. I no longer have the same feelings I had at school. I'm not even annoyed.

"To hell with them," I think. "I'll do without big magazines. They want something 'ordinary.' They want something like a classic. That impresses them. That's very easy to do. But I don't intend writing for readers who don't exist. The people have a different idea of literature."

I'm not bitter. I know I'm right.

In A Beerhall

Daytime. Sunshine. I go along the Nevsky Prospect. Esenin's coming towards me.

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He's wearing a smart navy blue coat with a belt. No hat.

His face is pale. His eyes dull. He walks slowly. He mutters omething. I go up to him.

He is sullen and not inclined to talk. Despondency is written ll over him.

I try to go, but he won't let me.

"Do you feel bad? Do you feel ill?" I ask him.

"Why?" he asks in alarm. "Do I look bad?"

Suddenly he laughs and says:

"I'm getting old, dear friend. . . . I'll soon hit thirty. . . ."

We arrive at the Hotel Europe.

Esenin stands for a moment at the entrance, then says:

"Let's go across the street. To the beerhall. For a moment."

We go into the beerhall.

The poet V. Voinov it sitting at a table with his friends. He omes towards us looking delighted. We sit down at his table. omeone pours out mugs of beer.

Esenin says something to the waiter. He brings him a glass f rowanberry liqueur.

Closing his eyes, Esenin drinks. And I see life returning to im with every swallow. His cheeks become brighter. The gesures more certain. The eyes light up.

He's about to call the waiter again. To distract him I ask im to recite some poetry. . . .

He readily agrees for some reason and is even delighted.

Standing up, he recites the poem "The Black Man."

People gather around the table. Somebody says: "It's senin."

Practically the whole beerhall crowds round us.

A moment later Esenin is standing on the chair and, gestiulating, recites a short poem.

He recites wonderfully and with such feeling and such pain hat everyone is shaken.

I have seen many poets on the stage. I have seen them re-

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ceived with tremendous success, and I've heard the delighte ovations and the delight of entire audiences, but I have nev known such feeling and warmth as for Esenin.

Dozens of hands raise him from the chair onto the tabl Everyone wants to clink glasses with him. Everyone wants t touch him, clasp him and kiss him.

The crowd is tightly ringed around the table where he sitting.

I leave the beerhall.[3]

It's My Fault

Evening. I go along the Nevsky with K.

I met her in Kislovodsk.

She is pretty, witty and amusing. She has the joie de vivr which I lack. Perhaps that attracts me most in her.

We go along, tenderly holding hands. We come out by th Neva. We go along the dark embankment.

K. talks endlessly about different things. But I don't liste very carefully to what she's saying. I listen to her words lik music.

Then suddenly I hear displeasure in the music. I liste carefully.

"This is the second week we've been walking about th streets," she says. "We've covered all these silly embankments an parks. I just want to sit with you in a hotel, and talk a bit, an drink tea."

"No, we might be seen there."

"Ah, yes. I had forgotten." She has quite a complicated lif A jealous husband and a very jealous lover. Many enemies wh would report that they had seen us together.

We stop on the embankment. We hold each other. We kis She murmurs:

3. Esenin committed suicide in Leningrad in 1925.

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"Oh, how stupid. We are in the street!"

We walk again and kiss again. She covers her eyes with her ıand. She is dizzy from the endless kisses.

We reach the gates of a house. K. murmurs:

"I must go in here and see the dressmaker. Wait for me ıere. I'll just try on a dress and be right back."

I walk up and down by the house. I walk up and down for en minutes, fifteen. Finally she arrives. Happy. Laughing.

"Everything's all right," she says. "It's a very pretty dress. t's very modest and unpretentious."

She takes me by the hand and I see her home. I meet her ive days later. She says:

"If you like, we can meet today at the house of a friend of nine."

We arrive at the house. I recognize it. It was where I waited wenty minutes for her. It's the house where the dressmaker lives.

We go up to the fourth floor. She opens the door with her ey. We go into the room. It is a well-furnished room. Not like . dressmaker's room.

From professional habit I leaf through a book I find on a mall table. On the front page I see a familiar name. It is the ıame of K.'s lover.

She laughs.

"Yes, we're in his room." But don't worry. He's gone away ɔ Kronstadt for two days."

"K.! It's not that I'm worried about. So you were here ʌith him then?"

"When?" she asks.

"When I waited twenty minutes for you by the door."

She laughs. She closes my mouth with a kiss. And says:

"It was your fault."

September Twenty-Third

The window of my room looks out onto the corner of the foika and the Nevsky Prospect.

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I go over to the window. A very strange sight—the river has swollen and turned black. Another half meter and it will overflow its banks.

I run out into the street.

Wind. An unheard-of wind blows from the sea.

I go along the Nevsky Prospect. I am excited and aroused. I reach the Fontanka Canal. It is practically level with the roadway. Here and there water is splashing on the sidewalk.

I jump into a streetcar and go over to the Petrograd side of Leningrad. That's where my family lives—my wife and tiny son. They live with relatives. I moved to the House of the Arts so that the infant's crying wouldn't disturb me.

Now I hurry to them. They live on the first floor in Pushkarskaya Street. Perhaps they'll have to move up to the second floor.

The streetcar turns into the Alexander Prospect. We ride through water. We stop. We can't go any further. Wooden blocks from the roadway are floating about and prevent the streetcar from moving.

The passengers jump out into the water. It's not deep here—knee-high.

I walk through the water and reach the Bolshoi Prospect. There is no water yet on the Prospect.

I almost run all the way to Pushkarskaya Street. The water has not reached it yet. My dear ones are upset and alarmed. They are very glad I've come and am now with them.

I put on my coat again and go out into the street. I want to see whether the water is still rising.

I come into the Bolshoi Prospect. I buy bread at the baker's. I go on to Vvedenskaya Street. It's dry.

Suddenly I see a strange light—there is water pouring from every manhole and flooding the roadway at a great rate. I wade home through the water.

The water has already reached the stairway.

We move up to the second floor with our belongings.

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I make chalk marks on the stairway to see whether the flood is rising.

At five p.m. the water is splashing at the door.

It grows dark. I sit at the window and listen to the wind howling.

Practically the entire city is under water now. The water has risen four meters.

The dark sky is lit by the glare of some kind of conflagration.

Dawn. From my window I see the water gradually receding. I go out into the street. A ghastly sight. A barge piled with wood in the street. Beams. Boats. A small sailing ship with a mast is lying on its side. Devastation, chaos and destruction everywhere.

The Train Was Late

Alya came in breathlessly and said:

"Didn't want to let me go . . . you've got to realize Nikolai, I said, I must see my best friend off—she's leaving for Moscow and doesn't know when she'll be back. . . ."

I asked Alya:

"When does the train leave with your friend?"

She laughed and clapped her hands.

"You see," she said, "and you believed it . . . no one's leaving. I just made it up to be able to come and see you."

"The train for Moscow leaves at 10:30," I said. "That means you have to be home about 11:00."

It was already midnight when she looked at her watch. She gave a shriek and ran over to the telephone without even putting on her slippers.

She sat down in a chair and picked up the receiver, trembling with cold and emotion.

I threw her a shawl. She covered her legs with it.

She was strikingly pretty—almost like a painting by Renoir.

"Why are you telephoning?" I asked her. "You had better get dressed and leave."

She waved her hand at me in annoyance.

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"Nicky," she said into the mouthpiece. "Just imagine, the train was late and has only just left. I'll be home in ten minutes."

I don't know what her husband said, but she replied:

"I'm telling you, the train was late. I'll be home presently."

Her husband probably said it was midnight. "Really?" she said. "Well I don't know what your watch says, but here, by the station clock. . . ."

She threw back her head and looked at my ceiling.

"The station clock here," she repeated, "say exactly eleven." She narrowed her eyes as though looking at a distant station clock. "Yes," she said, "exactly eleven, actually two minutes past eleven. You must have a funny sort of watch. . . ." Your watch must be wrong.

She hung up and began to laugh. Today this little sawdust-filled doll would be a most welcome guest. But then I was angry with her. I said:

"Why do you tell lies so brazenly? He will check his watch and see you've told a lie."

"But he believed I was at the station," she said, putting on lipstick.

Having finished painting her lips, she added:

"Why tell me off anyway. I don't want to listen. I know what I'm doing. He runs around with a revolver threatening to kill my friends and me too in the bargain. . . . Incidentally, he won't care whether you're a writer or not . . . I'm sure he'll shoot you just as splendidly."

I mumbled something in reply.

Putting on her coat, she said:

"So you were angry? Perhaps you don't want me to come any more?"

"Just as you please," I answered.

"No, I won't come to see you any more," she said. "I see you don't love me at all."

She left with an imperious nod of her head.

She did it beautifully for her nineteen years.

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Heavens, how I could cry now! But at the time I was glad. Anyway, she came back in a month.

At Table

Moscow. I'm sitting at a table in a theater club. The table is set for two. Mayakovsky is going to have supper. He ordered his meal and went off to play billiards. He'll be back in a moment.

I hardly know Mayakovsky. We've met only at the theater and at parties.

Here he comes towards the table. He's breathing heavily. His face is grim. He's morose. He wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.

He won the game, but this hasn't cheered him up. He sits down heavily at the table.

We scarcely exchange a word. I pour him some wine. He takes only one sip, then leaves the glass.

I'm also morose. And I don't want to make artificial conversation. But Mayakovsky is a *maître* for me. I am almost a novice in literature; I have only been working five years. I feel guilty that I'm silent. I begin to mumble something about billiards and literature.

For some reason it's extraordinarily heavy going for me.

I speak incoherently and uninterestingly and stop after every word. Suddenly Mayakovsky laughs.

"No, really," he says, "I find it very pleasant. I thought you would make jokes, be witty and clown, but you . . . no, it's just wonderful! Absolutely wonderful. . . ."

"Why should I make jokes?"

"Well, you're a humorist! You're supposed to. You . . ."

He gives me a rather pained look. He has surprisingly unhappy eyes. There's a dim light in them.

"Why are you . . . like that?" he asks.

"I don't know. I'm trying to find out."

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"Yes?" he asks cautiously. "Do you suppose there's a reason? Are you sick?"

We begin to talk about illness. Mayakovsky enumerates several ailments from which he is suffering—something wrong with his lungs, stomach and kidneys. He can't drink and even wants to give up smoking.

I notice one more ailment in Mayakovsky—he is even more concerned about his own health than I am about mine. He wipes his fork twice on his napkin. Then he wipes it with a piece of bread. Finally, he wipes it with his handkerchief. He also wipes the edge of the glass.

An actor I know comes up to our table. Our conversation is interrupted. Mayakovsky says to me:

"I'll call you in Leningrad."

I give him my number.

Public Appearance

I had agreed to speak in several cities. It was an unfortunate day in my life. My first appearance was in Kharkov, then in Rostov.

I was taken aback. I was greeted with stormy applause, but at the end they hardly clapped at all. So in some way I displeased the public, deceived them in some way. How?

It's true I don't read like an actor; I read motonously, sometimes boringly. But surely they don't come to my evening to hear me as a "humorist"? Really! Maybe they think that if actors can recite a work humorously, what will the author himself be like?

Each evening is torture for me.

I mount the stage with difficulty. The knowledge that I am about to deceive the audience spoils my mood even more. I open the book and mumble a story.

Someone cries from the back:

"Give us 'The Bathouse' . . . 'The Aristocrat' . . . why are you reading that rubbish!"

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"Heavens!" I think. "Why did I agree to these evenings?"

I look wretchedly at my watch. Pieces of paper fly onto the stage. A chance for a rest. I close the book.

I unfold the first note. I read it out.

"If you're the author of these stories, why do you read them?"

I am annoyed. I shout in reply:

"And if you're a reader of these stories, why in hell do you listen to them!"

The audience laughs and applauds.

I open the second note:

"Rather than read what we all know, tell us in a funny way how you came here."

In a furious voice I shout:

"I got on the train. My relatives wept and implored me not to leave. They warned me I'd be pestered with stupid questions."

A burst of applause. Laughter.

Ah, if only I could walk around the stage on my hands or ride around on one wheel, the evening would be a success.

The man who organized my appearances whispers to me from the wings:

"Tell them something about yourself. They like that."

Submissively I begin to tell them my biography.

Pieces of paper come flying onto the stage again.

"Are you married? . . . How many children do you have? . . . Do you know Esenin?"

It's a quarter to eleven. I can finish.

Sighing sadly, I leave the stage amid sparse applause. I am consoled by the fact that they are not my readers. I am consoled by the fact that this is an audience which would attend a performance given by any comedian or conjurer with just as much zeal.

I leave for Leningrad without fulfilling my contract.

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Beasts

I wander around the Leningrad zoo.

There is a huge and superb tiger in a cage. Alongside him is a small white dog—a fox terrier. It was she who suckled the tiger. And now, as the tiger's mother, she is in the same cage.

The tiger looks at her lovingly.

An amazing sight.

Suddenly, I hear a horrifying cry behind me.

Everyone rushes to a cage in which are some brown bears.

We see a ghastly scene. Next to the brown bears is another cage containing bear cubs. The two cages are separated by a wooden partition, as well as by iron bars.

A little cub has climbed up this partition, but his paw has got stuck in a crack. And now a brown bear is viciously worrying the little paw.

While trying to free himself, the squealing bear cub gets his other paw wedged in the crack. Now a second bear seizes this paw.

They both tear at the cub so much that one of the onlookers faints.

We try to drive the bears away with sand and stones. But they only get more vicious. There's a paw with black claws lying on the floor of the cage. I grab hold of a long pole and hit the bear with it.

Keepers and officials come running up at the sound of the terrible squealing and roaring of the bears. They pull the cub away from the partition.

The brown bears pace furiously up and down the cage. Their eyes are bloodshot. Their muzzles are covered with blood. Growling, the male mounts the female.

The unfortunate bear cub is taken to the office. Its front paws have been torn off.

It's not squealing anymore. It will probably be shot. I begin to understand what beasts are. And the way they differ from humans.

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Enemies

Sunday. I go down the street. Someone calls out "Misha!" I see a woman. She is dressed simply; she is carrying a bag of groceries.

"Misha!" she repeats, and the tears run down her cheeks.

Before me is Nadya V.'s sister—Katya.

"Good heavens," she mutters, "It's you . . . it's you. . . ."

My heart is thumping terribly.

"I thought you'd left!" I say. "And where's Nadya? Your family?"

"Nadya and Marusya are in Paris . . . let's go to my place and I'll tell you everything . . . but don't be surprised—I live very simply . . . my husband is a very good man . . . he respects and pities me . . . he's an ordinary laborer. . . ."

We go into a little room.

A man gets up from the table. He is about forty. After greeting me he immediately puts on his coat and goes out.

"You see how good and tactful he is," says Katya. "He realized at once I wanted to talk to you."

We sit down on the couch. Emotion is choking us. Katya begins crying. She cries so loudly that someone opens the door and asks what happened.

"Nothing," shouts Katya.

She is again shaken with sobs. She's probably crying for what is past. She probably sees the past in me. Her youth, her childhood. I calm her down.

Going across to the washbasin, she wipes her tearful face and blows her nose loudly.

Then she begins to talk. In 1917 she went to the south intending to reach the Caucasus and then escape abroad. But in Rostov she caught typhus. It was not possible to wait. Only a few days were left. Her sisters drew lots to see who would stay with their father. Katya stayed. She was in dire straits when her father died. She worked as a charwoman, then as a housemaid.

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Later she managed to get to Leningrad. But it was no better there—she had no apartment and no friends.

"Why didn't you come to me," I asked. "You must have heard about me. . . ."

"Yes. But I didn't think it was you."

Katya began speaking of her sisters. The elder one writes to her, but Nadya doesn't. She hates everything she left in Russia.

"And what if I write to her?" I ask.

Katya says: "You know Kolya M. You remember how much he loved her. He wrote to her. She sent him a postcard on which there were four words: "Now we are enemies."

Katya and I parted. I promised to visit her.

It's Disgusting

Alya arrived. Her face was pale and there was misery in her eyes. Silently she untied the brightly-colored scarf around her neck. She threw back her head slightly.

On her neck I saw five blue fingermarks. Someone had probably tried to strangle her.

"Alya, what happened!" I exclaimed.

She answered dully:

"Nikolai found out everything. He tried to strangle me, but I made such a noise that people came running."

She began crying. Through her tears she said:

"Ah, why did I come to see you! Now my peaceful life has ended. I shall never go back to it. I'll move to my mother's and come to see you from time to time."

I put a hot compress on her neck, and taking a taxi, drove with her to her mother's.

I was extremely upset. I don't remember what my idea was but the same evening I went to see her husband. To my surprise he greeted me calmly.

I said to him:

"I didn't expect such a filthy trick from you. You could

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have left her and gone away . . . but to try to strangle this little girl . . . it's disgusting. . . ."

I thought he would shout at me or even throw me out. But without moving he sat down and, lowering his head, he said quietly:

"She drove me to distraction. I suspected she wasn't faithful. Then yesterday I found this note in her bag. Just look. . . ."

He threw the note on the table. It was addressed to the actor N., with whom I had seen Alya a few times in the street.

The note left no doubt; she had been intimate with him to the highest degree.

I was amazed, even staggered. I was so staggered that at first I didn't realize that her husband knew nothing about me and that his only concern was with the actor.

I looked at him in confusion. He looked at me just as confused.

And what has this to do with you anyway?" he asked. "Why, did you see her today? Was she at your place? Did she used to visit you?"

I suddenly saw in his eyes that he had guessed.

I covered my eyes with my hand.

"Good God." He cried. "So she . . . and you . . ." He was suddenly struck by the irony of it and burst out laughing. Almost calmly he said: "So she deceived you as well . . . that's a good one. . . ."

We parted coldly. Practically without saying good-bye.

I went home in a daze. My mind was full of chaos. I wanted to solve the problem of why she had come to me with her bruises. Then I calmed down at the thought that before coming to me she had been with her bruises to the actor.

Madness

A man comes into my room. He sits down in an armchair.

For a moment he sits silently, listening. Then he gets up and closes the door tightly.

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He goes over to the wall and, putting his ear to it, listens.

I begin to realize he is mad.

Having listened at the wall, he sits down in the chair again and covers his face with both hands. I see he is in despair.

"What's the matter?" I ask.

"They're after me," he says. "I was in a streetcar a moment ago and I heard their voices clearly: 'There he goes . . . catch him . . . seize him . . .' "

He covers his face again with his hands. Then he says quietly:

"You alone can save me. . . ."

"How?"

"We will swap surnames. You will be Gorshkov and I'll be the poet Zoshchenko." (That's what he said—"poet.")

"Good. I agree," I say.

He jumps towards me and shakes my hand.

"And who is after you?" I ask.

"I can't say."

"But I have to know since I'm taking your name."

Wringing his hands, he says:

"That's the point; I don't know myself. I can only hear their voices and at night I see their hands. They reach out towards me from all sides. I know they'll seize me and strangle me."

His nervousness is transferred to me. I feel unwell. My head spins. There are spots before my eyes. If he doesn't go away immediately, I shall probably faint. He has a devastating effect on me.

Gathering my strength, I mumble:

"Go away. You now have my name. You can relax." He leaves with a joyful expression.

I lie down on the bed and feel a terrible misery overpowering me.

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In The Hotel

Tuapse. A small hotel room. For some reason I'm lying on the floor. My arms are widespread and my fingers are in water.

It is rainwater. The storm has just passed. I don't want to get up to shut the window. Torrents of rain have come through the window.

I shut my eyes again and lie in a kind of stupor until evening.

I probably ought to move over to the bed. It would be more comfortable there. There's a pillow. But I don't want to get up from the floor.

Without getting up, I reach out for the suitcase and get out an apple. I haven't had anything to eat today either.

I bite off a piece of apple. I chew it like a straw. I spit it out. It's nasty. I lie there till morning.

In the morning someone knocks on the door. The door is locked. I don't open it. It's the maid. She wants to clean the room. Only once every three days. I say:

"I don't want anything. Go away."

During the day I get up with difficulty. I sit on the chair. Alarm seizes me. I realize that I cannot go on like this. I will die in this wretched room if I don't go away immediately.

I open my bag, and feverishly gather up my things. Then I ring for the maid.

"I'm sick," I tell her. "I must be taken to the station and bought a ticket . . . immediately. . . ."

The maid brings the manager and a doctor. Patting my hand, the doctor says:

"Nerves . . . it's only nerves . . . I will prescribe bromide for you. . . ."

"I need to leave immediately," I mumble.

"You will leave today," says the manager.

Conclusions

And so my reminiscing was over.

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I had reached 1926. Right up to the day when I stopped eating and almost died.

In front of me I had thirty-three stories. Thirty-three happenings which at some time or another affected me.

I began looking through each story. In one of them I had hoped to find the reason for my misery, my bitterness, my sickness.

But I did not find anything in these stories.

Yes, of course, some of them are depressing. But no more depressing than most people's experiences. Everyone's mother dies. Everybody has to leave home at some time. Or part with his beloved. Fight at the front.

No, I did not find what I was looking for in any of the stories.

Then I put all the stories together. I wanted to see the overall picture, the overall chord which perhaps stunned me like a fish which is taken from the water and thrown into a boat.

Yes, of course, I've had many shocks in my life. A change of fate. The collapse of the old world. The birth of a new life, new people, a new country.

I didn't see any disaster in that! After all, I was also striving to see the sunlight. And I was dogged by misery even before these events. So they were not the cause of the problem. So that's not the reason. On the contrary, they helped me to rediscover the world, my country and the people for whom I began working. . . . There should be no misery in my heart! But there is.

I was disheartened. It seems I set myself an impossible task in seeking the reason for my misery, seeking the unhappy event which turned me into a miserable speck of dust blown about by the winds of life.

(*Translated by John Richardson*)

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Julia Neiman

1941[1]

Those Moscow days . . . The avalanche of war . . .
Uncounted losses! Setbacks and defeats!
Yet, comrades of that year, tell the whole truth:
Bright as a torch it flamed, that shining year!
Like crumbling plaster, subterfuge flaked off,
And causes were laid bare, effects revealed;
And through the blackout and the camouflage
We saw our comrades' faces—undisguised.
The dubious yardsticks that we measured by—
Forms, questionnaires, long service, rank and age—
Were cast aside and now we measured true:
Our yardsticks in that year were valor, faith.

And we who lived and saw these things still hold
Fresh in the memory, and sacred still,
The watches, roof-tops and barrage-balloons,
The explosive chaos that was Moscow then,
The buildings in their camouflage attire,
The symphony of air-raids and all-clears—
For then at last seemed real
Our pride as citizens, pure-shining pride.

(*Translated by Walter N. Vickery*)

1. This poem is a dramatic statement in verse of the feeling most Russians had at the beginning of World War II that, in Pasternak's words, "when the war broke out, its real horrors . . . were a blessing compared with the inhuman power of the lie, a relief because it broke the spell of the dead letter." It appeared in the *Almanac of Literary Moscow* #2, November, 1956, whose publication represented an attempt on the part of Moscow writers to achieve some independence from bureaucratic control. It contained many outspoken poems and stories which were later, during the panic caused by the Hungarian revolution, fiercely attacked.

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Lev Kassil

THE TALE OF THE THREE MASTER CRAFTSMEN[1]

Once upon a time there was a country called Sinegoriya. There, amid the blue mountains, for that is what the name means, lived hard-working and happy people. Nature was kind to them and the climate was very mild so that the inhabitants neither froze in winter nor suffered in summer from excessive heat, since they could always find a cool spot under the palms and monkeybread trees. And the once terrible volcano Quiproquo had long been asleep and now only snored from time to time, which no longer frightened anyone. Children tobogganed down from its snow-capped top and people roasted chestnuts in the very crater.

Travelers came from far-off countries to gaze with awe upon the blue mountains, to taste the delicious fruit which grew there in abundance, and to purchase mirrors of peerless clarity

1. Lev Kassil, like many Soviet Jewish intellectuals, comes from Odessa. Mainly a writer for children, he is an accomplished stylist who has perhaps put his subtle mind at the service of children because, like a number of other Soviet writers, he has found it easier to express certain political ideas in fairy-tale form, rather than in the cramped, plain language required for adult reading.
This is an independent story within a children's novel called *My Dear Boys,* published in 1947. Only in this form was it possible to put across the astonishing anti-Stalinist satire which it patently represents. In 1949, at the height of the campaign against "homeless cosmopolitans," Kassil was severely criticized for having given the name "Commandos" (from the British irregular forces) to the secret society of Young Pioneers to whom this story is told in the book.

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and the famous swords which were strong and sharp and yet so slender that you only had to turn them edgeways to make them invisible.

The fruit, mirrors and swords of Sinegoriya were famed throughout the world, and who did not know that at the foot of the volcano Quiproquo lived three great Master Craftsmen: Amalgam, the glorious Maker of Mirrors and Crystal; Isobar, the highly-skilled armorer; and wise John Greenfingers, the renowned gardener and fruit-grower.

Isobar's mighty hands could easily bend the thickest iron bar, yet they could also weave the thinnest chain mail. He forged both swords and plows, while the children of Sinegoriya played with intricately-designed rattles which the kind craftsman made for them. John Greenfingers grew grapes which were as large as apples, and apples which were as huge and heavy as watermelons. In his garden were roses and lilies of unmatched beauty. Their aroma made people gay like a very strong wine. But the Master Craftsman whom the people of the blue mountains loved most was Amalgam. He could make glass, the facets of which caught the seven colors of the rainbow, and his mirrors possessed the mysterious power of retaining sunbeams in their depths and radiating them in the dark. And when the finest of these sunbeams were plucked, they sang like the strings of a lute. Everyone loved the Master Craftsman, for the people of Sinegoriya were fair of face and there were few who were distressed by the mirrors. The children were delighted at the seven-colored tinkerbells which danced from the mirrors.

Then it happened that for many years no travelers were able to reach Sinegoriya. Raging storms barred the way to all ships which tried to approach the island. Nevertheless, one daring seafarer and his valiant comrades finally managed to sail to the shores of Sinegoriya. But when the ship had dropped anchor and the weary travelers had gone ashore, they hardly recognized the once happy and prosperous country where they had so often tasted the sweet fruit and breathed the intoxicating scent of the

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flowers, fenced with lightweight invisible swords and gazed at themselves in crystal-clear mirrors.

The streets were deserted. Shutters and wide-open doors banged constantly. Unabating, the wind whistled in chimneys, howled in the streets like a dog, and tore at people's clothing. The citizens walked about with their heads down as though bowing to the wind, and the trees bent down to the ground. The wind blew dried leaves along the dust-laden road and there was no sound of children's laughter or the song of birds, nor was there any scent of flowers. The only noise was a squeaking and rattling from all around as the weathervanes twirled on the rooftops.

"What has happened?" asked the voyagers in dismay.

"Can't you see?" came the reply. "The winds have ruined us. Everything has gone with the wind."

The travelers then learned that the country had been seized by the evil and stupid king who lived on a neighboring island. He was called Vainglorious the Eleventh-and-Three-Quarters, because Vainglorious the Eleventh had long since ended his reign and died, and whole numbers were awarded only after a certain number of years service. Hence the first Vainglorious had been called Zero, and then had come Vainglorious the First-and-a-Half, Vainglorious the Second-and-a-Half, and so on. Before the Vaingloriouses the dynasty of Braggarts had been on the throne. They had ruled for so long that the people lost count, and the last of them had simply been called Braggart and Five-Figures-Point-Something. King Vainglorious the Eleventh-and-Three-Quarters was an extremely frivolous person. He spent so much money on dandifying himself that he finally squandered his entire wealth. His people began saying that he had thrown prudence to the wind, that he was full of hot air, and just a windbag. And they were right. It was because of this that the winds of the whole world decided that King Vainglorious was just the right person for them—the most scatterbrained king in the world. They gathered on the island and sought to persuade the king. "Would you like us to broadcast your fame to all

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corners of the earth? Would you like us to waft away your sad thoughts, O King?" "Go on, then," said the stupid king.

And the winds became the masters of the country. Power was seized by the Secret Council of Winds. All inhabitants were ordered to fit weathervanes to their roofs so that all and sundry could see which way the wind was blowing. Under penalty of death the inhabitants had to keep their doors open wide. All the children caught chills. Drafts penetrated into houses through every door, window and crack, caught up every word and reported back to the king. The Chiefs of the Chimney Draft, specially appointed by the king, saw to it that people disposed of all their possessions up the chimney. Only wind instruments were allowed. The king surrounded himself with weathercocks and windbags. The Court Windgauge, who was a sly rogue called One-Upon-a-Time, became the Prime Minister, and, in effect, the ruler of the land. The king awarded him the Order of the Fan, the Chain of the Great Ventilator and the highest distinction of all, the "Wind Rose."

The three splendid Master Craftsmen were seized by the king's weathercocks and taken to the island. John Greenfingers was only allowed to grow dandelions. The armorer was ordered to make weathervanes—weathervanes and nothing else. And the splendid Amalgam was told to break all his mirrors and never make any more, for the king was extremely ugly and it had often happened that having seen himself in the mirror, he had smashed it in fury. The winds hated all forms of glass because it prevented them from blowing through windows, and the evil and greedy Once-Upon-a-Time forbade mirrors so that people could not see for themselves how the winds had dried them up. And the great Master Craftsman, whose mirrors had been an abode of light and beauty, was now forced to become a purveyor of soap bubbles. King Vainglorious was very fond of blowing bubbles, and Master Craftsman Amalgam knew some secret mixtures. He mixed them into soap, and the king blew silvery, mirror-like bubbles of an enormous size. They rose high into the air and took a long time

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to burst. But Amalgam knew that the phase would not last, for art is eternal only when man can freely put the whole of his heart into it.

Hard times came upon Sinegoriya. The evil winds dried up the fields and gardens; where there had once been forest land was now a mass of wind-fallen trees, where there had once been sweet-scented roses was now overgrown with weeds. All that was heard was the howl of the winds in the chimneys and the rattle of the iron weathervanes, while the king kept blowing soap bubbles, listening to the spinning of the weathervanes and the blaring of brass bands and gazing with pleasure at the thistledown floating through the air.

In the meantime John Greenfingers' daughter Melchiora had grown up a thousand times more beautiful than the finest lily which had ever adorned his flower-beds. And the clear-eyed Amalgam, languishing in his dingy dungeon, fell in love with her. Melchiora's eyes reminded him of the rainbow and her laughter was like the crystal tinkle of rays reflected in a mirror.

The girl also fell in love with the Master Craftsman for his radiant eyes, light-colored hair and sunny nature. John Greenfingers tried to hide his daughter from the king, but the drafts got to know this and reported to Vainglorious.

"Whew!" whistled Vainglorious, seeing how beautiful Melchiora was. "I didn't know that the old gardener had been hiding his finest flower from us . . . why shouldn't I make his daughter a member of my court?"

The beauty started back in horror from the greedy monster.

The king realized that Melchiora would never love him, so, on Once-Upon-a-Time's advice, he resorted to cunning. He knew there was not one mirror in the palace and that Melchiora had never seen her face and had no idea she was beautiful. So Vainglorious ordered all those who surrounded John Greenfingers' beautiful daughter to tell her she was monstrously ugly. From then on, whenever they met Melchiora, the courtiers would turn away in disgust and horror, and the king took advantage of

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every occasion to say to her: "You see how kind I am! I, the king and mighty conqueror of the winds, offer you my love and invite you to become a courtier. See, they all turn away from you, you are so ugly. But I have a kind heart, I remember your father's services to me and I'm not squeamish. Consent and perhaps I may make you my queen."

But Melchiora stubbornly continued to reject the king.

"Am I really so ugly?" she used to ask Amalgam in dismay. "How is it you love me?" "Believe me, you are the most beautiful girl in the world," Amalgam would answer. "And I am ready to say it anywhere, even if the winds tear me to pieces for those words. Alas, if I had but one mirror, I could let you look at yourself and you would never be able to take the mirror away."

But Melchiora was never able to see her face. Whenever she went into the streets, the king ordered her face to be covered so that the people should not be frightened at her ugliness.

"Look into my eyes," Amalgam said to her. "Can you not see how beautiful you are?" "No," answered Melchiora, "in your eyes I can only see the love which overpowers everything and dazzles me, and probably you too, and I see nothing else."

"Then go to the lake and look at yourself—the water will tell you the truth!" exclaimed Amalgam.

So the beautiful Melchiora ran to the lake. She leaned over its mirror-like surface and began to gaze at her reflection. But one of the winds hastened after her and began blowing on the water. The mirror rippled and Melchiora's beautiful features were hideously distorted. She shrank back in horror, covering her eyes with her hands. "The king is right," she said. "I am really extremely ugly. Amalgam must surely have loved me out of pity."

Yet, she still wanted to find out once and for all whether or not she was ugly. "If I am so ugly, Your Majesty," she said to the king, "why do you not help me to be certain? Allow Master Craftsman Amalgam to make one mirror, no matter how small."

The king did not know what to say. He was not very clever

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or quickwitted, that conqueror of the winds. But the cunning Once-Upon-a-Time helped him out once more. "Let him make an untrue mirror," he advised. "Let her admire herself in a curved mirror."

The king sent for Amalgam and said: "They say you are very bored without your mirrors, Master Craftsman. I will allow you to make one mirror, but it must be curved so that whoever looks in it will see himself ridiculous and unattractive. And the better looking the person, the more hideous he will be in the mirror. Let the nose be twisted across the face, let the eyes pop out onto the cheeks, let the mouth stretch from ear to ear and the ears hang like a dog's!" "No! Never," answered Amalgam. "My mirrors shall never distort the true face of beauty."

The king was enraged: "Do you dare disobey my commands! Do you want to be thrown down the ventilator! Seize him!" "Wait . . . let me think first," said Amalgam.

He was silent for a moment, and then as though making up his mind, he said, looking into the king's face with his clear eyes: "All right, let it be as you say; I will make a mirror of that kind." "But don't try any tricks," the king warned him. "I shall look into the mirror myself to test it."

Amalgam went off to his workshop, fanned the fire until it blazed and set the crucible to heat. He spent three days and three nights making the mirror and another three days and three nights polishing it. And the mirror he made was finer than anything he had ever made before. Then he told the king the work was completed.

The king looked at the mirror from the side and said: "The surface doesn't look curved to me." "That is the whole secret, Your Majesty," answered Amalgam. "It looks like an ordinary mirror, but won't you take a look in it?"

The king looked at himself in the mirror. He was hideously ugly, but had not seen himself for so many years that he roared with delight.

"Well done, Master Craftsman; I shall award you the

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Order of the Fan. Your mirror really does distort the human face! Look! My nose goes across my face, my eyes are popping out, my mouth reaches from ear to ear, and my ears hang like a dog's. Thank heaven it is a curved mirror."

And no longer worried, Vainglorious sent for Melchiora.

"I have carried out your request, Melchiora" said the king. "Here is the truest mirror; it was made by your friend Amalgam. Look into it and admit that I told you the truth." The king snickered as he spoke those words.

Hardly had Melchiora looked into the mirror, when she stepped back and covered her face with her hands in incredulity.

"Now I hope you know what you're like," said the contented king. "Yes, now I know what I'm like," said Melchiora quietly and again looked in the mirror, unable to tear herself away. "There you are," said the king. "Now you won't be so stubborn."

In a happy mood, the king sent for his courtiers and told them all to look in the mirror. The Ministers and Lords, the weathercocks and Chiefs of the Chimney Draft gazed at themselves in the mirror and then spat with disgust: "We certainly have ugly mugs in this mirror!"

They had not the slightest idea that Amalgam had made a perfectly plain and true mirror. It was only the sly Once-Upon-a-Time who suspected something was wrong. He seized the mirror, suddenly held it up before Amalgam's face and saw that the Craftsman was reflected in it just as clear-eyed as he was in actual fact.

"Look, Your Majesty," howled Once-Upon-a-Time, "the rascal has cheated us! He has made a magic mirror which distorts our own faces and the beautiful countenance of the king but reflects his own face and that of this stubborn girl in undistorted fashion."

"Right, this time it's the ventilator for you!" shouted the furious king.

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He smashed the mirror against the stone floor with such spite that the glass broke into a thousand pieces.

The king's weathercocks seized Amalgam and threw him into a dark dungeon without a single ray of light.

The next day the rebel was tried by the Council of Winds.

The Council of the Winds met in an enormous courtroom in which the ceiling was marked with the four points of the compass and instead of a chandelier there quivered a gigantic compass needle.

The first to enter were numerous Tradewinds and Monsoons who took up their stand on the left and right of the throne.

The Chief Windmaster of the Royal Court announced the arrival of the Winds. In swept the Cyclone, gusty, twisted, tightly wrapped in his cloak. His eyes flashed lightning. He was whipping along in front of him a gigantic humming top made of water and sand. . . . From the opposite door came tottering his adversary—the flabby and listless Anticyclone. He was bent low under the weight of a cyclinder of compressed air. His loose, colorless clothing flapped as he went.

"Mister Northeaster, the northeast wind!" announced the Windmaster.

The Northeaster blew in, red-nosed with a long white flowing beard and wrapped in furs. It became very cold in the courtroom. The wind breathed with a whistle and his breath settled on the floor as hoarfrost. He was leading his son, Pine Forest, with his long bony hand which had icicles instead of fingers.

"Mister Southwester, the southwest wind!" called out the Windmaster.

"Atchoo!" Snuffling and sneezing, the Southwester came in. He was wearing a plastic raincoat and carrying an open umbrella, dragging his rubber-shod, rheumatic feet, and leaving wet marks on the parquet flooring. Coughing and sneezing could be heard throughout the courtroom.

Then there was a piercing whistle and in came another

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Wind, this time wearing a flapping scarf the color of meerschaum and a wreath of withered vine leaves.

"Signor Sirocco, the terror of the vineyards!" proclaimed the Windmaster.

With a pirate's ring in one ear and his swarthy cheeks puffed out, wheezing through his few teeth and slashing the air with a Samurai sword, came the slant-eyed Typhoon.

"Khan Sandstorm!"

And everyone felt a blast of hot air. The wind entered panting heavily, and licking his cracked lips with a dry, pallid tongue. His piercing eyes were inflamed and on his shaven head was a wreath of feather-grass and wormwood. He was followed by the Tornado, the wind from the West Indies and prairies, in a cowboy hat, clinking the spurs on his moccasins and twirling a swishing lasso above his head. Then came the half-naked Fang, a handsome brown-haired man with fiery eyes and a thin, dry mouth—the destroyer of the Colchis mandarins. The curly golden fleece was slung across his bronzed shoulders.

"Khamsin, Master of the desert!"

Into the courtroom staggered a scarecrow, as high as the ceiling, roaring like a bull in fury, rolling his crazy eyes and gnashing his sandy teeth; he was shaggy, red haired and dressed in tatters.

Finally, taking a deep breath as though about to chill the whole world, the Windmaster announced: "His Royal Majesty, King Vainglorious, Great Commander of the Winds!"

The organ bellows began to pump; puffing out their cheeks, the musicians played a fanfare. Everything squeaked and howled. The drafts flitted from corner to corner and a small eddy raced across the courtroom shouting "Make way for the king!"

Vainglorious entered accompanied by the Chief Windgauge, Once-Upon-a-Time, and a retinue of henchmen; he was wearing a crown with a huge weathervane on top.

"Gentlemen of the Wind," began the king, "be seated!"

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The winds reclined on wide divans. The Royal Court was in session.

Weathercocks led Master Craftsman Amalgam into the courtroom. As soon as they saw him, the winds began howling and roaring. A storm rose in the room. The Windmaster had great difficulty in coping with this hurricane and restoring calm in the court.

Fearless and clear-eyed, the Maker of Mirrors looked at the king and those around him.

Once-Upon-a-Time roared out the charge.

"Do you plead guilty?" asked the king.

"I am only guilty," began the Master Craftsman proudly, "in that I have never distorted the beautiful, hid the ugly, flattered the unsightly, nor avoided telling people the truth."

"Burn out his eyes!" howled the Khamsin.

"Fill his mouth with sand!" roared the Simoom.

"Lash him with rain!" proposed the Southwester.

"Twist him into a whirlwind," shrieked the Cyclone.

"Freeze him!" said the Northeaster through gritted teeth.

"Strangle him and stamp on him!" bellowed the Tornado.

"Let him commit hari-kari!" cried the Typhoon.

"Into the ventilator with him!" shouted the king.

"Into the ventilator with him!" repeated the winds.

That was the worst kind of execution.

Amalgam was shut up in a high tower in one of the walls of the castle. The execution was fixed for the next morning.

* * *

The beautiful Melchiora ran to Isobar the armorer and threw herself on her knees before him, imploring him to save Amalgam. But how could they find out which tower he was in, and how could they save him when all the towers were as straight and smooth as candles!

When Amalgam came to his senses after the tortures to which the weathercocks subjected him, he felt himself and found a piece of glass in his pocket. It was a fragment of the mirror

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which Vainglorious had smashed in his fury. Amalgam had managed to hide it.

He climbed up onto the ledge of the narrow window in the tower and caught a ray of sunlight in the glass. A spot of rainbow-colored light danced over the roofs, towers and walls of the palace. Then suddenly the spot of light, the envoy of the Master Craftsman, danced into the hovel where Melchiora wept, wringing her tender hands, and Isobar clenched his mighty fists in helplessness. Melchiora immediately guessed that this was a messenger from Amalgam.

She ran to the window and saw a rainbow-colored ray coming from a window in one of the towers.

Immediately her father, the wise John Greenfingers, clapped his hand to his forehead and said: "Oh, what a greenfingers I am! I have some bindweed seed. I have grown it for fifty-five years in succession! I tended it day and night until it could look after itself. This weed grows so fast that if you stretch a thread from the top to the foot of Quiproquo and plant the seeds below, shoots will instantly weave around the thread and before you can say one-two-three, bindweed will be blossoming at the very top of the mountain. But listen. I once tried sowing it during a shower. You can imagine what happened. Like lightning it wound round a stream of rain and before the rain could reach the ground, it had already climbed up to the sky. I put these seeds aside for a rainy day, daughter, to be able to weave a wreath around the house which you would live in with your lover, but it seems the time has now come to use it. Don't cry, we will save Amalgam. I will sow the bindweed below the window of the tower in which he is imprisoned." "But the tower is high and the window is at the very top. How can we stretch the thread so high or make rain?" wondered Isobar. "My bindweed is so strong and fast-growing that it only needs a straight sunbeam and it will climb up it. But we cannot do this in the daytime," he said, "the guards will see, and at night there's no sun."

"Yes, but the moon is full just now." "The king has posted

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his most loyal weathercocks at the tower," warned Melchiora. "They are on guard all night." "I will undertake the task," Isobar reassured her. "I will wreck all the weathervanes on the palace. The winds will quarrel and confusion will follow!"

And that is what happened. Towards nightfall the winds saw that the arrows on the palace weathervanes were pointing in different directions and they immediately became excited.

"It's my turn to blow" howled the Northeaster, "but the weathervane shows Southwest! Call the guard and have the vanes mended!"

Disorder reigned in the palace. The weathercocks rushed off to look for Isobar, but there was no trace of him.

In the meantime the moon had risen. Catching her pearly light in his piece of mirror, Amalgam sent down a slender, quivering, transparent ray. Wherever it touched the earth, John Greenfingers sowed a handful of his magic seeds. In an instant powerful shoots twined themselves around the rays and climbed to the top of the tower.

There were many of these green shoots. They bound themselves into a thick, strong rope, and Amalgam was easily able to climb down to the ground. And when one of the sentries threw himself at Amalgam, having heard the noise, the Craftsman blinded him with a ray from his mirror. And so the Master Craftsmen Amalgam and John Greenfingers escaped from the palace. It was agreed that Melchiora would wait for them on the shore where Isobar had already fitted out a small ship with a loyal crew. But when the fugitives reached the shore, John Greenfingers was unable to find his daughter and Amalgam could not find his beloved. They did not know that the sly Once-Upon-a-Time had locked up the beauty in a dungeon during the night.

Amalgam wanted to go back at once to the palace to free Melchiora, but John Greenfingers and Isobar the Armorer would not let him go, thinking that to do so would be unwise and that Amalgam would only destroy both himself and Melchiora, for

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she could only be saved if the three Master Craftsmen set about it while at large.

They found shelter with kind and brave people called Commandos. These were reliable fellows, hard working and fearless, skilled craftsmen and brave soldiers. "Valiance, loyalty, labor and victory!" was their slogan. There was no work they could not do. There was no danger which could daunt them. They had long intended to rid the country of Vainglorious and the evil winds. "He who sows the wind, shall reap the storm," the Commandos used to say. They greeted the three glorious Master Craftsmen joyfully and respectfully, and invited them to join the family of Commandos.

"Valiance! said Isobar. "Loyalty!" added Amalgam. "Labor!" said John Greenfingers. "Victory!" cried all three, repeating the Commandos' oath.

Then Isobar the Armorer said: "I know what I must do. So far I have made weathervanes which show the direction of the wind. But now it is up to us to turn the wind in the direction we want. John Greenfingers put all his heart into his bindweed seeds, and the plant acquired the magic power of growth. I will work with the weathervanes and we will subdue the winds."

And without delay he seized a hammer in his powerful hands and set to work.

"You're right!" responded Amalgam. "And I will set to work too. What have my mirrors done so far? They have obediently reflected beauty and shown people their defects. But beauty and ugliness exist apart from my mirrors. I will put my mind to it and work day and night until I make mirrors which will themselves make the world more beautiful. I want people to reflect everything with which I imbue the mirror by my toil and love, for it is said that there is no force in this world superior to creative work, provided man has chosen it of his own will.

And the Master Craftsmen set to work. They toiled day and night without fatigue, without taking sleep or rest. A great fury inspired the armorer and fanned the fire under his furnace. A

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great love gave the Maker of Mirrors strength and shone in his crystal.

Time passed, for toil and perfection need time. . . .

* * *

. . . Time passed while the beautiful Melchiora languished in captivity. The cruel Once-Upon-a-Time had thrown her into a filthy dungeon. Cold slimy toads kept jumping on her, smooth-tailed rats nipped her beautiful face, and wood lice crawled all over her arms. Very soon there was not a trace of her former beauty left. Once-Upon-a-Time brought her a piece of mirror which had accidently been overlooked in the palace. How bitterly the poor Melchiora wept when the dull glass reflected a yellow, ugly, wrinkled face covered with weals, scars, welts, bruises and sores.

"What have you done to me," cried the poor girl.

At this point Once-Upon-a-Time thought of another crafty plan.

"Don't fret," he said, "you're as beautiful as ever. It's just a crooked mirror. We have captured your Master Craftsman and he has renounced both you and his stupid truth. As you see, he has made a crooked mirror for you. Now you must give in."

But at that moment Melchiora caught sight of Once-Upon-a-Time's face in the mirror before he had time to move aside. The face in the mirror was as spiteful and hideous, and just as horrible, as it was in reality. Melchiora realized that the evil Windgauge was trying to fool her again, though she also saw that the mirror was telling her the bitter truth. Yet she was glad at this, for to lose faith in love seemed much more terrible to her than to lose her own beauty.

By that time the Master Craftsmen had finished their work and the Commandos were making ready for their campaign against Vainglorious. But the drafts sent by the king had already penetrated through cracks into the Commandos' camp. It was soon known at the palace where Amalgam, Isobar and John Greenfingers were hidden, and Vainglorious sent military wind-

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craft to the blue mountains where the Commandos were in hiding.

It was a rainy day and the showers kept falling and falling. The Winds blew heavy thunderclouds towards the mountains with windcraft hidden inside them. But John Greenfingers dropped a handful of seeds at the foot of the mountain and the bindweed instantly climbed up the streams of rain to the clouds, some of the shoots even managing to encircle the lightning which streaked from the clouds. A thick wall of greenery stretched to the very sky all round the Commandos' quarters, entangling Vainglorious's windcraft like flies in a spider's web and making them crash to the ground.

Then the Commandos made preparations to storm the palace. On the eve of their attack they replaced all the weathervanes in the country with new ones. The hard-working Isobar had made thousands of vanes imbued with a magic power. Before setting out to do battle, Master Craftsman Amalgam made each Commando look in his new mirror and as soon as he saw himself, each one became braver, abler and more loyal to the cause.

At last the day of reckoning arrived. The arrows on all the weathervanes turned their tips in the direction of the palace. The Commandos sallied forth. Isobar armed them with newly-made magic arrows. The Commando warriors carried spears with crystal points, and behind each spear there arched a tiny rainbow. In addition to this, every Commando was armed with a small mirror attached to a bracelet and a basket with bindweed seeds. At dawn the Commando ships stealthily approached the shores of the island.

With their rainbow-colored flag flying, the Commandos launched their attack. Storm-guns rattled from the walls of the castle. The Winds were just about to throw themselves upon the Commandos when they saw that not a single weathervane had moved. Then a miracle occurred. The splendid Isobar had put so much fury into his work that the Winds were unable to do a

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thing with the weathervanes. The weathervanes were out of control. No matter how the winds blew, no matter how they puffed out their cheeks, all the vanes pointed in one direction—towards the palace. Since the thousands of arrows fired by the Commandos were made of the same magic metal as the vanes, they went right through the approaching hurricane and, carrying the air with them, made a powerful new hurricane of their own. The old winds were forced to surrender. The hurricane shook the palace, sweeping the guards from the walls. Then beams of yellow light from thousands of little pocket mirrors surrounded the castle and in an instant bindweed and ivy wove round and round these rays all the way up to the battlements. Commandos scrambled up the green strings as though they were rope ladders. They stormed into the castle and killed all the weathercocks. Soon, above the biggest tower, there fluttered the Commandos' rainbow-colored flag, the flag of the Great Rainbow, the herald of good weather and bright happiness.

Once-Upon-a-Time tried to escape from the palace in a windcraft, but the infuriated winds seized him, and since each one was blowing in his own direction, the Chief Windgauge was blown to pieces. The frightened king was found hiding under the stairs.

"Right," said the Armorer, "Now you are Vainglorious-Exactly-the-Twelfth, and there will be no more to come after you."

In the meantime Master Craftsman Amalgam was speeding through the passages and corridors of the castle in search of Melchiora. He went through all the towers and casemates, and, finally, in one of the dungeons, he found a wrinkled, starved, hideous-looking creature. When she saw him, the unfortunate girl gave a cry and hid her face in her hands. But her cracked voice was deliciously familiar to Amalgam.

"Who are you?" he asked, afraid he might be wrong.

"Don't you recognize me? I was once your beloved. Now

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I can die in peace for I know that you remained loyal to your truth. I cannot live any more as hideous as I am."

"Wait," exclaimed Amalgam, "if you believe in my love, look into this mirror." "No, I don't want to. I haven't the strength to see my ugliness again, not even once."

And she dropped lifeless to the ground.

Amalgam threw himself down on his knees, held a mirror to her lips and saw it misted for a second. She was alive. He warmed her deathly-pale face with kisses and forced her to look in the mirror.

Overcoming her repulsion, Melchiora looked at herself in the glass. Suddenly something wonderfully soft passed across the mirror. And as she watched, Melchiora felt her features obeying the spell of the mirror, her face becoming clearer, the wrinkles smoothing out, her sores healing, and, in effect, she felt herself growing more beautiful every moment.

"Keep looking, keep looking," said Amalgam.

She gazed intently into the glass and suddenly she was again as beautiful as ever—even more enchanting than before.

And when she and Amalgam went out onto the balcony together, the Commandos met them with whoops of joy. They shook their spears and the crystal tips sent up myriads of colored lights which merged into one triumphant rainbow and arched across the sky. Then John Greenfingers sowed seed round about and roses and lilies blossomed on the spot.

That is how the three Master Craftsmen helped the free Commandos to rid themselves of the Winds. The Winds were all incarcerated beneath the castle and only allowed out when needed for work, that is to say to clear the sky of clouds, turn the windmills or fill the sails of ships. The gardens bloomed again in Sinegoriya, the mirrors glittered once more and dampers were put back on the stoves, while on the walls of the castle appeared a new coat of arms—a rainbow with an arrow entwined in bindweed.

(*Translated by John Richardson*)

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Ilya Ehrenburg

PEOPLE, YEARS AND LIFE[1]

1. The publication last winter of the first installment of Ehrenburg's memoirs in *Novy Mir* was the political and literary sensation of Moscow. Ehrenburg's tortuous intellectual career has earned him the reputation of an arch double-dealer, denouncer and cynical opportunist. Now he is concerned with showing that this is perhaps an oversimplification. Throughout his memoirs he reasserts in emphatic form his patently "revisionist" ideas on literature and art for which he has fought since Stalin's death.

This excerpt has been taken from a section of the memoirs in which Ehrenburg reminisces about various artistic figures in the 'twenties. In some ways it is the most extraordinary document to appear in the Soviet press since Stalin's death. It throws open the whole question of the true nature of Mayakovsky who, after Stalin's canonization of him in 1935, was obligatorily regarded in the works of critics and in textbooks as a "reinforced-concrete" proletarian poet. Ehrenburg shows —as is obvious from Mayakovsky's lyrical work—that far from being made of concrete, he was a vulnerable, sensitive, neurotic and in many ways helpless person for whom the Revolution proved only a tragically short-lived solution to his inner anguish.

For young Soviet intellectuals who have been reared on the myth of Mayakovsky, as on many other myths about the avant-garde of the 'twenties, this comes as a sensational revelation. Until now the only real Mayakovsky was to be seen in the heroic bronze statue on Mayakovsky Square from which Ehrenburg, as he tells us, always averts his gaze.

Ehrenburg has also given the young Soviet intellectuals a completely new idea of those avant-garde painters, like Malevich and Tatlin, who were closely associated with Mayakovsky, and who have long been forbidden in the Soviet Union. For Stalin's inscrutable political reasons, these painters were not permitted to enter into Soviet mythology, but became "un-persons," cast out of Russian cultural history in the 'thirties, in order to make way for the socialist realist painters of the type of Gerasimov. Now young people are being told that these painters were an essential "link" in Russian artistic tradition. Ehrenburg's re-

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I do not remember who introduced me to Mayakovsky. The first time we met we sat in some cafe or other and talked about the cinema, then he took me home—a small room at the San Remo rooming house in Saltykov Street, near the Petrovka. Not long before I had read his "As Simple as Mooing." I had imagined him exactly as he was—a big man with a heavy jaw and eyes which were alternately sad and hard. Loud-mouthed, gauche and always spoiling for a fight, he was a cross between an athlete and a dreamer, a medieval mountebank who prays on his head, and an implacable iconoclast.

On our way to his room, he mumbled the epitaph written by François Villon while awaiting the gallows: "I'm François, though not glad of it, / A doomed rogue this confesses, / Whose neck will surely know quite soon,/The weight his ass possesses."[2]

No sooner had we arrived when he said: "I will now read you . . ." I sat on a chair while he stood. He read me his long poem "Man" which he had finished not long before. The room was small and there was no one else but me, but he read as though declaiming

habilitation of them is admittedly cautious; he seeks to show that even at the time he had doubts about their extreme modernism. He therefore dwells much on their avid political support of the Revolution—support much in contrast with the academic artists of the time, many of whom emigrated, but who, by a supreme irony, were to be restored to favor by Stalin.

One interesting aspect of Ehrenburg's rehabilitation of early Soviet art may escape the Western reader. There is an increasing realization, even in the most conservative Soviet official circles, that a great modern state which wishes to compete with its rivals for world power cannot impress its image on those it seeks to influence without to some extent adopting those achievements of modern art which are taken for granted in the West. The design of a Soviet book cover, of a woman's scarf, or even of a humble match box may mean much in terms of the Soviet image abroad. As Ehrenburg suggests in his memoirs, the adoption of the principles of modern design depends upon some recognition of the avant-garde of the 'twenties.

The full text of the Ehrenburg memoirs is to be published by Alfred A. Knopf.

2. This Russian jingle is a deformation of Villon's: "Je suis François, dont ce me poise, / Né de Paris emprès Pontoise, / Et d'une corde d'une toise, / Sçaura mon col que mon cul poise."

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to a crowd in Theater Square. I looked at the awful wallpaper and smiled. Boot-tops were indeed becoming harps.

Mayakovsky amazed me. He somehow combined poetry with revolution, and turbulent streets of Moscow with that modern art which the habitués of the Rotonde dreamed of. I even felt that he could help me find the right path. It turned out differently: Mayakovsky was for me a tremendous event in poetry and in the life of our century, but he had absolutely no direct effect upon me, remaining close and yet infinitely distant at the same time.

This may be the mark of genius, or it may have been simply Mayakovsky's character. He used to say that poets ought to be "different," and was himself the sponsor of LEF, New LEF and REF[3]; he wanted to enlist the support of many people and bring them together, but the only people around him were his followers, and sometimes his epigones. He told me how he used to talk to the sun at his country house near Moscow,[4] but he was himself a sun, around which his satellites orbited.

I met him in Moscow in 1918 and 1920, in Berlin in 1922, in Paris, and again in Moscow, and then again in Paris (the last time we saw each other was in the spring of 1929, a year before his death). Sometimes our encounters were fleeting, and sometimes long and significant. I would like to say something of what I think of Mayakovsky; I know that this will be one-sided and subjective, but can the testimony of a contemporary be otherwise? It is easy to recreate an image of a man from a great number of different and sometimes contradictory accounts. The trouble is that Mayakovsky, though a passionate destroyer of various myths, himself became a mythical hero with extraordinary rapidity. It is as though he were fated to become something different from what he was. There are eye-witnesses who have recorded some of his savage jokes. There

3. Mayakovsky's "ultra-revolutionary" literary organizations which fought for the introduction of Mayakovsky's style, derived from futurism, as the one style adequate for the epoch of technology. New LEF (Lef Front) and REF (Revolutionary Front) made some concessions to increasing conformism demanded by RAPP. In 1929, Mayakovsky left REF and announced his adherence to RAPP.
4. The subject of a famous Mayakovsky poem, "An Extraordinary Adventure."

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are the school textbooks. And last but not least there is his statue. There is the teenager who learns bits from "Good!" by rote and there is the housewife in the streetcar who asks anxiously: "Are you getting off at Mayakovsky?" How difficult it is to speak about people. . . .

Until the mid-'thirties, Mayakovsky was the subject of passionate argument. Whenever his name was mentioned at the First Congress of Soviet Writers,[5] some applauded wildly while others were silent. At the time I wrote in *Izvestia*: "We did not applaud because somebody[6] wanted to canonize Mayakovsky—we applauded because for us Mayakovsky's name stood for the rejection of all literary canons." I could never have imagined that a year later Mayakovsky would actually be canonized. I did not go to his funeral. Friends tell me that the coffin was too short. It seems to me that in fact it was Mayakovsky's posthumous glory which was not only too short, but more important, too constricting.

I want first of all to talk about the man. He was by no means a "monolith"; he was huge and complicated, with tremendous willpower, and a bundle of sometimes contradictory sensations.

Anna Segers[7] called her novel *The Dead Are Always Young.* First impressions are almost always eclipsed by later ones. In this book I have tried to talk about the young Alexei Tolstoy, who was one of the first writers I ever met. But often when thinking of him I see a corpulent man, with his fame, with his loud laughter and tired eyes—just as he was in the last years of his life. Then I look at a photograph—standing next to Mayakovsky is Alexander Fadeyev, young and dreamy, with tender eyes. I find it very difficult to remember Fadeyev in this way. Now I see those cold eyes, full of self will. . . .[8] But Mayakovsky remains young in my memory.

5. 1934.
6. That "somebody" was to be Stalin who proclaimed in 1935 that "Mayakovsky was and remains the best and most talented poet of our Soviet epoch. Indifference to his memory and to his work is a crime."
7. A leading and notoriously conformist East German writer.
8. Fadeyev, who committed suicide in 1956, was Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers during the worst post-war years before Stalin's death, and as such was responsible for the most savage of the literary purges following Zhdanov's denunciations in 1946.

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To the end of his life he retained certain traits, or rather certain habits from his early youth. The critics do not like to dwell too long on Mayakovsky's so-called "futurist" period, although his later epic verse cannot be understood outside the context of his early poems. But I am not now talking about poetry, but about the man. Mayakovsky, of course, soon gave up not only the yellow smock[9] but also the slogans of the early futurist manifestoes. But he retained the spirit which motivated the "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" in the way he behaved, in his jokes and in his replies to questions at his public readings of his verse.

I remember the Poets' Cafe in the winter of 1917-18. It was on Nastasinsky Street. It was a very strange place. The walls were covered with weird paintings and just as weird inscriptions. "I like to watch children dying" was a line from an early, pre-revolutionary poem by Mayakovsky which graced the wall to startle newcomers. The Poets' Cafe was not a bit like the Rotonde; here no one talked about art, argued or beat his breast; there were only actors and spectators. The visitors to the cafe were, as they said in those days, "unslaughtered bourgeois," black marketeers, writers, "respectable citizens" out for a good time. Mayakovsky was hardly their idea of a good time. Although they couldn't make out much of his poems, they sensed there was a close connection between his strange words and the sailors[10] walking along Tverskaya Boulevard. But they all understood Mayakovsky's jingle about the bourgeois who gorges himself on pineapple just before the end.[11] There were no pineapples on Nastasinsky Street, and even humble pork stuck in their throats. What amused the visitors was something else. For instance, David Burlyuk,[12] smothered in powder and with lorgnette in hand, would go up onto the stage and read his verse "I like pregnant men . . ." Goltschmidt also created a stir in the audience; on the posters he was billed as the "real-life futurist" but he wrote no verse. Instead he gilded two curls on his head with a special powder, had

9. His costume as a futurist.
10. The most revolutionary element at this period, and the terror of the bourgeoisie.
11. "Eat pineapple, eat grouse, the end has come, you bourgeois louse!"
12. The futurist painter who "discovered" Mayakovsky. He later emigrated and now lives on Long Island.

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extraordinary strength, broke wooden beams in two with his bare hands, and bounced trouble-makers out of the cafe. Once the "real-life futurist" decided to erect a monument to himself on Theater Square; it was of plaster, not very big and by no means futuristic—it was a statue of Goltschmidt in the nude. The passerby were indignant, but did not dare tamper with the mysterious monument. But later it was smashed to pieces anyway.

These are all things of the past. Two years ago two American tourists—David Burlyuk and his wife—came to Moscow. In America, Burlyuk draws, makes a fairly good living, and has gone respectable; the lorgnette and the "pregnant men" are no more. To me futurism now seems far more ancient than ancient Greece. But for Mayakovsky, who died young, it was, if not a living thing, still close to his heart.

I went to the Poets' Cafe rather often and once I even performed and was paid by Goltschmidt.

I remember an evening when Anatole Lunacharsky[13] came to the cafe. He sat down modestly at a rear table and listened. Mayakovsky asked him if he would like to speak. He refused. Mayakovsky insisted: "Repeat what you told me about my poetry." Lunacharsky had to speak. He talked about Mayakovsky's talent, but criticized futurism and spoke in passing of the futility of self-advertisement. Then Mayakovsky said they would soon put up a monument to him at the very spot where the Poets' Cafe then stood. He was only a few hundred meters off—the monument was erected not far from Nastasinsky Street.

Was this conceit or arrogance? The question has often been put by Mayakovsky's contemporaries. Take, for example, the way he celebrated the twelfth anniversary of his career as a poet. He often called himself the greatest of poets. He demanded recognition during his lifetime—this was very much in the spirit of the times, and part of that debunking of "idols" complained of by Balmont[14] which was aimed at drawing attention to art at all costs.

"I like to watch children dying . . ." Mayakovsky could not even stand the sight of a horse being maltreated. A friend of mine

13. Then Minister of Education.
14. The Decadent poet, Konstantin Balmont.

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in the cafe once cut his finger on a knife and Mayakovsky hurriedly turned away. Arrogant? Yes, of course, he was quick to answer his critics and to insult his literary enemies. I remember the following exchange: Member of the audience—"Your poetry is not fiery, stirring or catching." Answer—"I am neither a stove, a spoon nor a disease." Autographing books he always inscribed "For internal use only." All this is well known. Other things are less well known.

I remember Mayakovsky reciting one evening in the Cafe Voltaire in Paris. Lydia Seifullina[15] was there. It was the spring of 1927. Someone called out "Read us some of your old poems!" Mayakovsky, as usual, got out of it with a joke. When the evening was over, I went to an all-night cafe near the Boulevard Saint Michel with Mayakovsky, Seifullina, Elsa Triolet[16] and others. There was music and someone danced. Mayakovsky joked, mimicked the poet Gregory Ivanov[17] who had been at his reading, and then fell silent for a long time, looking around gloomily like a lion in a cage. We agreed that I would go see him the next morning, as early as possible. In his tiny room at the Hotel Istria, where he always stayed, the bed had not been slept in. He was in a bad mood and immediately, without greeting me, asked: "Do you think my early verse was better?"[18] He had no self-confidence: it was his studied pose that misled people.

I think that the pose was more a matter of calculation than of temperament. He was given to romanticism, but he was ashamed of it and held himself in check. "Who has not been a philosopher at the sight of the sea?" (he once said, pondering in a bitter mood about his life), and then immediately he added ironically, "it's just water." In his article "How to Make Verse" everything seems logical and simple. In actual fact Mayakovsky knew well the stresses and strains which creative effort inevitably involved. Here he talks in detail about how he "stored up" rhymes for future use, but he

15. A naturalistic Soviet novelist.
16. Russian-born French Communist writer who is the wife of Louis Aragon, and the sister of Lily Brik, Mayakovsky's mistress in Russia.
17. Emigré Acmeist poet.
18. Mayakovsky's early verse was almost entirely concerned with his personal torments. After the revolution his work became increasingly political in content.

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"stored up" other things—inner agonies—which he did not like to talk about. Just before his death he wrote in a poem that "love's boat has smashed against the daily grind." This phrase was a concession to the romanticism which he had so often ridiculed; in actual fact his life was smashed against poetry. Addressing posterity, he said things he did not want to say to his contemporaries: "But I subdued myself, setting my heel on the throat of my own song."

On the surface he was all strength, health and joie de vivre. But at times he was intolerably depressed; he was a terrible hypochondriac and always carried a cake of soap in his pocket, and whenever he shook hands with someone who was physically repulsive to him, he immediately went away and carefully washed his hands. In Paris cafes he drank hot coffee through the straws supplied for cold drinks, so as not to touch the cup with his lips. He made fun of superstition, but he was always consulting signs and omens. He loved gambling, flipping coins and double or quits. In Paris cafes there were automatic roulette wheels; you could put five sous on red, green or yellow; if you won, you received a metal token with which you got a cup of coffee or a glass of beer. Mayakovsky would stand for hours at these roulette wheels. When he left Paris he gave Elsa Triolet hundreds of tokens. He had no use for them, he had only wanted to guess which color would turn up. He put only one bullet in the cylinder of the revolver—again a game of double or quits. . . .[19]

Whenever Mayakovsky talked to women, his voice changed: usually harsh and incisive, it became soft. I read in a book by Victor Shklovsky, "Mayakovsky went abroad. He met a woman and there may have been a love affair. I am told that they were so like each other and got along so well that the people in the cafes smiled appreciatively when they saw them."[20] Mayakovsky's poem to Tatiana Yakovleva, the one mentioned by Shklovsky, has recently been

19. The method Mayakovsky chose to commit suicide in 1930—Russian roulette—has until now never been hinted at in a Soviet publication.

20. While in Paris in 1928 Mayakovsky fell desperately in love with a young White Russian émigrée, Tatiana Yakovleva. When he wished to return to France to visit her the following year, he was refused a visa by the authorities.

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published. And I have kept the manuscript of *The Bedbug* he gave to "Tata" (Tatiana Yakovleva), which she had thrown away. No, she was not like Mayakovsky, although, like him, she was tall and good looking. I do not want to indulge in what Mayakovsky rightly called "gossip," and have only mentioned this episode (by no means the most significant one in the poet's life) to show how little he resembled the bronze statue erected to him of the heroic St. Vladimir of popular legend.

When Mayakovsky was eighteen years old, he entered an art school—he wanted to become a painter. In his poetry his perception of the world is that of a painter; his images are visual, and not derived from his fantasy. He liked painting and had a feeling for it, and he also liked the company of artists. He didn't hear the world, he saw it (he used to say jokingly that an elephant had stepped on his ear).

I have mentioned elsewhere an evening at the Tsetlin's when Mayakovsky read "Man." Vyacheslav Ivanov[21] nodded his head approvingly from time to time. Balmont was clearly bored. Baltrushaitis[22] was as usual inscrutable. Marina Tsvetayeva[23] smiled, while Pasternak kept glancing lovingly at Mayakovsky. Andrei Bely listened ecstatically, and when Mayakovsky had finished reading, jumped up in such excitement he could hardly speak. Nearly everybody shared his enthusiasm. But Mayakovsky was annoyed by someone's cold, polite remark. This is how he always was—he seemed never to notice his laurels, but always to be seeking the thorns. In his verse he wages a constant battle with the enemies, real and imagined, of the new poetry. What was the real meaning of his taunts? Was he perhaps arguing with himself?

I have read some articles on Mayakovsky written abroad, whose authors try to prove that the poet was destroyed by the Revolution. It is difficult to imagine anything more absurd. Without the Revolution there would have been no Mayakovsky. In 1918 he rightly called me a "frightened intellectual"; it took me two years to understand what it was all about, but Mayakovsky understood and ac-

21. Symbolist poet who emigrated to Italy in 1924.
22. Yurgis Baltrushaitis, a Russian poet of Lithuanian origin.
23. The poetess who became an émigré in the early 'twenties. She committed suicide after her return to Russia in 1939.

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cepted the Revolution at once. He was not only carried away—he was completely absorbed by the building of a socialist society. He never made any concessions in anything and, when certain people tried to bring him to heel, he snapped back: " 'Turn your faces to the village.' That's the slogan they've launched. To your lyres, my poet friends! But understand, I've only one face—a face not a weathervane. You can't mix ideas with water; water's for turkeys to wet their feet. A poet without ideas has never even lived. What do you think I am? A parrot, or a turkey?" He was never in conflict with the Revolution; that's an invention of people who will stop at nothing in their struggle against communism. Mayakovsky's trouble was not the clash between poetry and Revolution, but the attitude of his LEF to art: "Let the poets moan, dribbling at the mouth, twisting their lips in contempt. I, striking out my soul, shout about what's needed in the time of socialism." At the time, one of the newspapers changed the words: "I, without humbling my soul," instead of "I, striking out my soul," but Mayakovsky restored the original text, which gives us the clue to his poetic and human achievement.

Mayakovsky liked Léger; they had something in common in their understanding of the role of art in contemporary society. Léger was enthralled by machinery and urbanism. He wanted art in his everyday life, and did not go to museums. He painted good pictures which, in my view, are decorative and do not in any way diminish our love of Van Gogh or Picasso, but which undoubtedly reflect modern times. For a number of years, Mayakovsky waged war against poetry not only in manifestoes and articles; he also tried to destroy verse with verse. The LEF magazine published a death sentence on art—on the "so-called poets," "so-called artists" and "so-called directors." Instead of traditional art, painters were advised to concern themselves with the aesthetics of machinery, textiles and pots and pans; directors were advised to organize folk festivals and demonstrations and say goodbye to the footlights, while poets were advised to leave lyrics alone to write for newspapers, and compose texts for posters and advertisements.

It wasn't so easy to give up poetry, even though Mayakovsky was a strong-willed man. But there were times when he desisted from his own expressed policy. In 1923, when LEF was still de-

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nouncing lyricism, Mayakovsky wrote his "About This."[24] It was not understood even by the people close to him, and was run down by both his allies and his enemies in literature, but nevertheless it enriched Russian poetry.

As the years went by, he relented in his renunciation of the art of the past. At the end of 1928, New LEF reported that Mayakovsky had stated publicly, "I pardon Rembrandt." I will remind readers once again that he died young. He lived, thought, felt and wrote in his own way—he was above all a poet. I remember the enthusiasm with which he spoke of the new industrial beauty of America in those distant years when the electrification of our country was still only an idea, when on the dark, snowbound Theater Square lamps shone with the sign: "Children are the flowers of life." I met him when he came back from America. Yes, Brooklyn Bridge is a great thing, of course, and they've got so many machines over there. But how barbarous and inhuman it is! He cursed and said how pleased he had been to see the tiny gardens of Normandy. LEF's program assumed rejection of Paris—where every house is a broken fragment of the past—and glorification of the ultramodern industrialized America. But Mayakovsky damned America, and not ashamed of seeming sentimental, declared his love for Paris. What is the reason for this contradiction? LEF lasted only a few years, while Mayakovsky was a great poet. In his programmatic verse he scoffed at the admirers of Pushkin and people who visited the Louvre, but he was also enchanted by lines from Onegin and by old paintings.

He realized right away that the October Revolution had changed the course of history; yet he saw the details of the future schematically, like a poster rather than a painting. Nowadays we would hardly be attracted by the hygienic idyll of the last act of *The Bedbug*. To Mayakovsky the art of the past seemed not so much alien as doomed. His iconoclasm was like a taking of the vows—"a feat of self-denial."[25] He waged war not only against various critics and against the authors of sentimental ballads, but

24. A long, lyrical poem, with suicidal overtones, in which Mayakovsky despairs of the infidelity of his mistress.
25. *podvig*.

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against himself as well. He wrote: "I want to be understood by my country, but if I am not—what then? I'll pass through my native land like a shower of slanting rain," and then crossed out these lines, thinking them too sentimental. But his native country did understand him, and also understood the beautiful verses he discarded.

I remember him in the autumn of 1928. At that time he stayed more than a month in Paris. We often met. I see him in a somber mood in a little bar called *La Coupole*. He ordered White Horse whiskey, drinking little of it but writing a ditty which went "White Horse whiskey is a good old mare, with a white mane, and white tail." Once he said to me: "Do you think I have an easy time of it? . . . I could write better verse than anybody." To the very end he was devoted to his concept of himself.

There has been much conjecture about why he committed suicide—some say it was difficulties over the exhibition,[26] others that it was the attacks of RAPP, and others that it was a love affair. I don't like this sort of guessing game: I can't view the life of a man I knew as I would the plot of a novel . . . I will say only one thing: people often forget that a poet is an unusually sensitive person, otherwise he wouldn't be a poet. Mayakovsky called himself an "ox" and spoke of his poems as "hippopotamuses," and at one gathering said he had had the hide of an elephant and that it was bulletproof. In actual fact he did not even have ordinary human skin.

According to Christian legend, the heathen Saul, once he had become the Apostle Paul, began to cast down the graven images of gods and goddesses. The images were perfection itself, but Paul succeeded in overcoming his sense of the beautiful. Mayakovsky cast down not only the beauty of the past, but himself as well; that is the greatness of his "feat of self-denial" and also the key to his tragedy.

In St. Petersburg there was a writer called Andrei Levinson, who was considered a connoisseur of choreography. In 1918 he published a lampoon of Mayakovsky in the magazine *Life of Art*. He was answered by many artists and also by Lunacharsky. Levinson emigrated to Paris. When he got the tragic news of Mayakovsky's

26. "Twenty Years of Work," an exhibition of Mayakovsky's writings and posters which took place a few months before his suicide.

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death, he wrote a vile and slanderous notice in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. Together with several French writers I composed a letter to the editors of this literary newspaper in which we expressed our indignation. The letter was signed by all decent French writers of the most divergent views; I don't remember anybody refusing to sign. I took the letter to the editor, Maurice Martin du Gard (he was an insignificant figure, nothing like the great writer Roger Martin du Gard). The editor calmly read through this extremely sharp letter and then said: "I would like to ask you to make one small change." I answered that the text could not be modified. "I am not asking for that, but perhaps you could change the phrase "We are outraged that a literary journal" to "we are outraged that *the greatest* of literary journals." He didn't mind being slapped on the face, but he wanted us to make clear that it was a big face. This would have been a great theme for Mayakovsky. . . .

Mayakovsky's fortunes in the world at large have been extraordinary. Not long ago some writers from black Africa talked to me about him; he had even reached them there. He orbits the world. His verse is of course difficult to translate and much of what he claimed to be the form of the future is now the form of the past. But as man and poet he is young as always. Neither Aragon, nor Pablo Neruda, nor Eluard, nor Tuwim, nor Nezval have ever written an imitation of Mayakovsky. But they all owe much to Mayakovsky—he taught them not new verse forms but how to make a courageous choice in life.[27]

We must be able to distinguish between the modern and the fashionable, between the pioneering spirit and various "novelties" which appear old-fashioned twenty-five years later. . . . In 1940 nine-tenths of the budding poets broke up their lines in Mayakovsky's manner, but they are now imitating other examples; fashions change. Mayakovsky was beaten about the head with volumes of Pushkin, Nekrasov and Blok. Should we now pummel the young with volumes of Mayakovsky?

I have said that Mayakovsky could have helped me figure many things out. I remember a conversation we had one night in

27. i.e. the choice of becoming a communist, which was made by all the poets mentioned, in various circumstances.

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February, or maybe March, 1918. We had left the Poets' Cafe together. Mayakovsky was asking all about Paris, Picasso and Apollinaire. Then he said he liked my poem on the execution of Pugachev. "You should be happy, but you're whining. That's bad!" I readily agreed: "Of course that's bad!" Politically he was right, as I soon realized, but we always thought and felt differently. In 1922 he told me he liked *Jurenito*.[28] "You understand many things better than other people. . . ." I laughed: "Actually I don't think I understand anything yet. . . ." We often met, yet never really came really close together.

I have often thought about Mayakovsky. Sometimes I disagree with him, but I am always full of admiration for his poetic achievements. I never look at his statue. It stands still, but Mayakovsky is on the move—through the newly built districts of Moscow, through old Paris, through the whole of our planet; he moves, not with his stocks of novel rhymes but with his new thoughts and feelings. . . .

Every morning the townsfolk carefully studied the still damp, crinkled decrees pasted on the walls to find out what was allowed and what was forbidden. Once I saw a crowd of people in front of a placard which bore the title "Decree No. 1 on the Democratization of the Arts." Somebody was reading out loud: "Art's permit to reside in those woodsheds and outhouses of human genius—palaces, galleries, salons, libraries and theaters—is hereby annulled together with the Czarist regime." "Heavens, they're taking away our outhouses!" squealed a woman. The man in spectacles who had read the "decree" aloud explained to her: "It doesn't say anything about outhouses, but the libraries will be closed down and the theaters, of course. . . ." The poster had been composed by the futurists and bore the signatures: "Mayakovsky, Kamensky and Burlyuk." These names meant nothing to the passers-by, but they all understood the magic word "decree."

I remember May Day, 1918. Moscow was decked out with futurist and suprematist paintings. Crazy squares wrestled with

28. *Julio Jurenito*, a picaresque novel by Ehrenburg published in 1922, whose hero is modeled on Diego de Rivera, and which pokes fun at all political systems, including the new Soviet regime.

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rhombuses, and faces with triangles instead of eyes spotted the peeling facades of colonnaded Empire mansions. (The art which is now called "abstract" and is much discussed both here and in the West, was at that time served up to Soviet citizens in unlimited quantities.) That year, May Day coincided with Good Friday. Worshippers thronged the street near the chapel of the Iberian Virgin. Trucks which had once belonged to the Stupin Company drove by draped with abstract canvasses. Actors on the trucks were performing various scenes such as "The Exploits of Stepan Khalturin" or the "Paris Commune." An old woman, looking at a cubist painting with an enormous fish eye, was wailing "They want us to pray to the devil. . . ."

I laughed, but my laughter was cheerless.

I have just reread an article I wrote in the summer of 1918 for the paper *Monday* entitled "Among the Cubists." In it I talked about Picasso, Léger and Rivera. I said that the works of these artists could be regarded either as "lunatic decorations of a house about to collapse, or as the foundation of a new structure, hitherto undreamed-of even in the dreams of artists."

It's no accident, of course, that Picasso, Léger and Rivera became communists. It was not the academically-inclined artists, but the futurists, cubists and suprematists who were on Red Square in 1918. What was it that disturbed me about the triumph of these artists and poets, who reminded me (though only outwardly) of the greatest friends of my early youth?

Above all, it was their attitude to the art of the past. Everyone knows that Mayakovsky developed and changed, but remained at the same time a passionate iconoclast: "You find a White Guardist, and put him against the wall. But what about Raphael? What about Rastrelli?[29] It's high time that bullets spatter the walls of museums. Shoot up that old rubbish through the maws of 100-inch guns. Deaf to White Guard blandishments, you've mounted your guns at the edge of the forest. And why isn't Pushkin taken by storm?" I could not understand this. Often, wandering along the streets of Moscow,

29. Count Bartolommeo Rastrelli, the Italian-born Rococo architect who designed most of St. Petersburg's palaces and government buildings during the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna.

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I have repeated Pushkin's verse to myself and lovingly recalled the old Italian masters. When first arriving in Moscow, almost the first thing I did was to race to the Kremlin. I was staggered by fifteenth-century painting; until then I had no idea of the Russian renaissance.

Arguments about the values of the past soon died down. Mayakovsky wrote a poem about Pushkin and materials on Mayakovsky have now been published in the Academy of Sciences "Literary Heritage" series.[30] (I have already mentioned the magazine *The Thing;* among its staff members were many representatives of our "left-wing-art"—Mayakovsky, Malevich, Meyerhold, Tatlin, and Rodchenko. In an article on the aims of the magazine I wrote: "It is now ridiculous and naive 'to throw Pushkin overboard.' There is a continuity in form and classical examples have no terrors for the modern masters. We can learn from Pushkin and Poussin . . . *The Thing* does not deny the past in the past, but calls for the modern in the modern. . . .")

Mayakovsky is not a difficult poet: his poems were always met with roars of laughter. Before the revolution people used to make fun of the pictures of the futurist artists (Malevich, Tatlin, Rodchenko, Puni, Udaltsova, Popova and Altman). After October the epigones of classical poetry and art began to pack their bags. Both Bunin and Repin went abroad. The futurists, cubists and suprematists stayed behind. Like their Western counterparts, and the pre-war habitués of the Rotonde, they hated bourgeois society and saw the way out in revolution.

The futurists decided that people's tastes could be changed just as rapidly as the economic structure of society. The magazine *The Art of the Commune* wrote: "We definitely lay claim, and would probably not refuse if allowed, to use the power of the state to put our ideas of art into practice." This was of course more of a dream than a threat. The Moscow streets were decked with suprematists and cubists mainly because the academically-minded artists were in the opposition (political not artistic). The results were nevertheless

30. The volume on Mayakovsky, published in 1958, which contains, among other biographical materials, some of his love letters, was soon withdrawn from sale and its editors accused of "defamation."

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lamentable. The trouble was not the old woman who thought that a cubist painting was the devil, but the artistic reaction which followed the brief appearance in the streets of "left-wing art."

Discoveries in the field of the exact sciences are provable, and whether or not Einstein is right can be decided by mathematicians and not by the millions of people who remember nothing but their multiplication tables. New art forms have always reached people's awareness slowly and by tortuous paths, being at first appreciated and accepted only by a few. In any case, it is not possible to prescribe, inculcate or foist tastes on people. The gods of the ancient Greeks used nectar, which the poets called ambrosia; but if nectar had been forcibly passed through a tube into the stomachs of the Athenian citizens, they would have probably ended up vomiting all over the town.

Anyhow, all this is now ancient history (not only arguments on who is going to bedeck the squares of Moscow, but also on "left-wing art"). Once again I will break the rules which oblige a writer of memoirs to keep to chronological order. I'm trying to understand what happened to me and many poets and artists of my generation. I don't know who entangled the threads—our opponents or we ourselves—but I will try to unravel them.

First of all, I would like to talk about myself. I was soon carried away by what was then called "constructivism" but I admit that the idea of "dissolving" art in life both inspired and repelled me. In 1921 I wrote a book called *E pur si Muove,* which was rebellious and naive, and something like the proclamations of LEF (LEF pointed out that "the Ehrenburg group's conclusions coincide with ours to a great extent"). I was seeking to show that "the new art ceases to be art." At the same time I was laughing at my own ideas; in the same year, I wrote *Julio Jurenito;* my hero reduces propositions of *E pur si Muove* to absurdity. Jurenito says: "Art is a hotbed of anarchy, and artists are heretics, sectarians and dangerous rebels. So art must be prohibited without hesitation in the same way that distilling hard liquor and importing opium are prohibited. The cubist or suprematist pictures can be used for various purposes, such as prototypes for kiosks on the main streets, designs on fabrics, and models for new footwear, and so on. Poetry is changing to the language of newspapers, cables and business conversations. . . ." I

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was not double-crossing—double-crossing, after all, always proceeds from either fear or deliberate calculation. I simply didn't believe very much in the death of art proclaimed by so many, including myself.

Futurism was born at the beginning of our century in provincial, technically backward Italy. There at every corner you could see magnificent monuments of the past, while the shops sold German knives, French saucepans and English cloth. Factory chimneys had not yet begun to elbow their way into the polite society of ancient towers. (The north of Italy can now compete with the most industrialized countries, but you won't find any more futurists in Italy who demand the burning of all museums, while the former futurists Carra and Severini are inspired by Giotto's frescoes or the Ravenna mosaics. The enthusiasm of Mayakovsky, Tatlin and other representatives of Russian "left-wing art" for industrial aesthetics during the first years of the Revolution is quite understandable; at that time not only lumps of sugar, but even matches were being sold singly on the Sukharevka.[31] In *Mystery Bouffe* Mayakovsky dreamt of the future as follows: "The airy giants of transparent factories and apartment houses will tower into the sky. Trains, streetcars and automobiles stand woven in rainbows . . ." (When the artist depicts nature or human emotions, his works do not grow old. Nobody would say that a woman of the twentieth century is more beautiful or more perfect than Nike of the Acropolis, created twenty-five centuries before; nobody laughs at Hamlet's anguish or Romeo's love for Juliet. But the painter has only to take to machinery and his Utopias are surpassed or refuted by time. Wells was an extremely educated man, and he thought that he foresaw the future, but the discoveries of modern physics have made his Utopian novels ridiculous. How could Mayakovsky foresee that streetcars would soon share the fate of horse-drawn buses or that trains would become an archaic means of communication?)

Picasso's cubist paintings were not born of a longing for machinery, but of a painter's desire to free himself from superfluous details in his depiction of man, nature, and the world. Nowadays few people are interested in the books of Metzinger, Gleizes or

31. Moscow's famous "flea-market."

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other theoreticians of cubism, but the canvases of Picasso, Braque and Léger are alive; they delight us, upset us and move us. Picasso considers himself the heir of Velasquez, Poussin, Delacroix, and Cézanne, and he never saw electric trains or jet aircraft as the legitimate heirs of art.

It stands to reason that art has always gradually become part of everyday life, changing buildings, clothing, vocabulary, gestures and household utensils. Medieval poetry with its chivalrous cult of womanhood helped people to find forms for the expression of their feelings. The canvases of Watteau and Fragonard became part of life, altered the layout of parks, men's suits, and dances, and have had an effect on divans and snuff-boxes. Cubism has helped modern city dwellers to free themselves from over-ornamented houses, it has had an effect on furniture, even on cigarette packages. The utilitarian use of art or its decorative use cannot be the aim of the artist, but it is a natural by-product of his creative flights. The opposite process is evidence of creative sterility. An abstract ornament is quite in place on fabric or on pottery, but when it claims the title of a work of art in itself, this is not the resurgence of art but its decline.

I was recently at a retrospective exhibition of Malevich in Brussels. His early work ("Jack of Diamonds" period) is very good. In 1913 he painted a black square on a white background. This was the birth of abstract art, which forty years later cast a spell on thousands of western painters. It seems to me to be ornamental first and foremost. Picasso's paintings represent a world with so many thoughts and feelings that they either arouse delight or genuine hatred; but the pictures of the abstract painters remain designs on fabric or wallpaper. A woman may put on a scarf with an abstract design, her scarf may be pretty or not, it may suit the woman or not, but it will never make anyone think about nature, man or life.

The headlong development of technology demands from the painter a more profound understanding of man's inner world. This was quickly realized by those advocates of "left-wing art," who were the champions of industrial aesthetics. After seeing America, Mayakovsky stated that industry would have to be muzzled. He was thinking, of course, of the part played by the painter, but he was

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not denying the necessity for technical progress (at that time, in 1925, there was extremely little modern machinery in Moscow); Mayakovsky realized that unless a humanistic muzzle was placed over the face of industry, it would bite man. Meyerhold, having forgotten about biomechanics, was absorbed in *The Forest*[32] and *The Inspector General,* and had visions of producing *Hamlet.* Tatlin took to conventional painting, while Altman painted portraits; Puni became a small landscape painter. In the meantime the nectar and the stomach tube had passed into different hands which were much more suited to such operations.

Our museums have a splendid collection of "left-wing art" from the first years after the Revolution. It's a shame that these collections are not open to the public. You can't remove a link from a chain. I know some young Soviet painters who "discover America" in 1960 and do (or rather try to do) what Malevich, Tatlin, Popova and Rozanova did in their time. If they could perhaps see the history of the development of these painters, they would not try to return to 1920, but would find something new in tune with our times. Our young poets know Khlebnikov's verse and appreciate his still, but do not try to imitate him blindly. Why is Tatlin "more dangerous" than Khlebnikov? Maybe because the monopoly of one trend has become particularly entrenched in the field of plastic art. . . .[33]

Naturally, the representatives of our "left-wing art" during the first years of the Revolution were mistaken in many ways. The mistakes of artists, writers and composers are discussed often and with avidity; this is hardly due to the fact that they alone make mistakes. . . . But now, looking back, I think with gratitude even of that canvas which scared the old woman near the Chapel of the Iberian Virgin. Much has been done, and a concentrate is always diluted. Noble traces of "left-wing art" can be seen in the works of a number of writers, painters, producers, film producers and composers of the ensuing decades.

Throughout my life I have never been an ardent supporter of any one school of painting. I compared the young Mayakovsky with

32. A classic nineteenth-century realist play by Alexander Ostrovsky.
33. i.e. socialist realism.

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St. Paul, who cast down the graven images of the false gods. Before he embraced the new faith, Paul was called Saul. In 1922, when I was defending constructivism and editing the magazine *The Thing,* Victor Shklovsky called me Paul Saulovich[34] in his book *Zoo*—this was spiteful but just. Through the whole of my life I have kept my love for many works of art of the past—the novels of Stendhal, the stories of Chekhov, the verse of Tyutchev, Baudelaire and Blok. It has not stopped my hating imitations or liking Picasso or Meyerhold. Paul must have a patronymic, and it's better to sculpt a new statue than to destroy, even for the highest reasons, a statue that has already been made. To the sculptor who chiseled the effigies of the Indian gods and goddesses in Ellora, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were gods; to us they were images created by the genius of man whose passions are close to ours and whose harmonies are clear to us.

Idols have outlived their time not only in religion, but also in art. Iconoclasm has died together with the adoration of icons. But could the desire to say something new in a new way really disappear on that account? I recently read the words "modest innovation" in a periodical; at first they amused me, then they saddened me. An artist must be modest in behavior, but by no means moderate, tepid or limited in his creative endeavors. Surely, it is more seemly to write squiggles in one's own way than to copy something of the past in neat handwriting. I feel that *kolkhozniks* depicted in the manner of the academic school of Bologna will give pleasure to few, and that it is not possible to convey the rhythm of the second half of the twentieth century with that plethora of relative clauses which Leo Tolstoy used so brilliantly.

(*Translated by John Richardson*)

34. A mock patronymic meaning "son of Saul."

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Vladimir Polyakov

THE STORY OF A STORY OR FIREMAN PROKHORCHUK [1]

(The action takes place in the editorial offices of a Soviet magazine. A woman writer—a beginner—shyly enters the editor's office.)

She: Pardon me. . . . Please excuse me. . . . You're the editor of the magazine, aren't you?

He: That's right.

She: My name is Krapivina. I've written a little short story for your magazine.

He: All right, leave it here.

She: I was w o n d e r i n g whether I couldn't get your opinion of it right away. If you'll permit me, I'll read it to you. It won't take more than three or four minutes. May I?

He: All right, read it.

She: It is entitled "A Noble Deed." (She begins to read.)

It was the dead of night—three o'clock. Everybody in the town was asleep. Not a single electric light was burning. It was dark and quiet. But suddenly a gory tongue of flame shot out of the fourth-floor window of a large grey house. "Help!" someone shouted. "We're on fire!" This was the voice of a careless tenant who, when he went to bed, had forgotten to switch off the electric hot-plate, the cause of the fire. Both the fire and the tenant were darting around the room. The siren of a fire engine wailed. Firemen jumped down from the engine and dashed into the house. The room where the tenant was darting around was a sea of flames. Fireman Prokhorchuk, a middle-aged Ukrainian with large black mustachios, stopped in front of the door. The fireman stood and thought. Suddenly he rushed into the room, pulled the smoldering tenant out and aimed his extinguisher at the flames. The fire was put out, thanks to the daring of Prokhorchuk. Fire Chief Gorbushin approached him. "Good boy, Prokhorchuk," he said, "you've acted according to the regulations!" Whereupon the fire chief smiled and added: "You haven't noticed it, but your right mustachio is aflame." Prokhorchuk smiled and aimed a jet at his mustachio. It was dawning.

He: The story isn't bad. The title's suitable too: "A Noble

1. Published in Moscow in 1953, this little frolic states in plain language some of the ideas which the editors of this special issue have been most concerned in conveying to their readers.

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Deed." But there are some passages in it that must be revised. You see, it's a shame when a story is good and you come across things that are different from what you'd wish. Let's see, how does it start, your story?

She: It was the dead of night —three o'clock. Everybody in the town was asleep. . . .

He: No good at all. It implies that the police are asleep and those on watch are asleep, and. . . . No, won't do at all. It indicates a lack of vigilance. That passage must be changed. Better write it like this: It was dead of night—three o'clock. No one in the town was asleep.

She: But that's impossible, it's night time and people do sleep.

He: Yes, I suppose you're right. Then let's have it this way: Everybody in the town was asleep but was at his post.

She: Asleep at their posts?

He: No, that's complete nonsense. Better write: Some people slept while others kept a sharp lookout. What comes next?

She: Not a single electric light was burning.

He: What's this? Sounds as if, in our country, we make bulbs that don't work?

She: But it's night. They were turned off.

He: It could reflect on our bulbs. Delete it! If they aren't lit, what need is there to mention them?

She: (reading on) But suddenly a gory tongue of flame shot out of the fourth-floor window of a large grey house. "Help!" someone shouted, "we're on fire!"

He: What's that, panic?

She: Yes.

He: And it is your opinion that panic ought to be publicized in the columns of our periodicals?

She: No, of course not. But this is fiction . . . a creative work. I'm describing a fire.

He: And you portray a man who spreads panic instead of a civic-minded citizen? If I were you I'd replace that cry of "help" by some more rallying cry.

She: For instance?

He: For instance, say . . . "We don't give a damn! We shall put it out!" someone shouted. "Nothing to worry about, there's no fire."

She: What do you mean, "there's no fire," when there *is* a fire?

He: No, "there's no fire" in the sense of "we shall put it out, nothing to worry about."

She: It's impossible.

He: It's possible. And then,

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you could do away with the cry.

She: (reads on) This was the voice of the careless tenant who, when he went to bed, had forgotten to switch off the electric hot-plate.

He: The what tenant?

She: Careless.

He: Do you think that carelessness should be popularized in the columns of our periodicals? I shouldn't think so. And then why did you write that he forgot to switch off the electric hot-plate? Is that an appropriate example to set for the education of the readers?

She: I didn't intend to use it educationally, but without the hot-plate there'd have been no fire.

He: And would we be much worse off?

She: No, better, of course.

He: Well then, that's how you should have written it. Away with the hot-plate and then you won't have to mention the fire. Go on, read, how does it go after that? Come straight to the portrayal of the fireman.

She: Fireman Prokhorchuk, a middle-aged Ukrainian . . .

He: That's nicely caught.

She: . . . with large black mustachios, stopped in front of the door. The fireman stood there and thought.

He: Bad. A fireman mustn't think. He must put the fire out without thinking.

She: But it is a fine point in the story.

He: In a story it may be a fine point but not in a fireman. Then also, since we have no fire, there's no need to drag the fireman into the house.

She: But then, what about his dialogue with the fire chief?

He: Let them talk in the fire house. How does the dialogue go?

She: (reads) Fire Chief Gorbushin approached him. "Good boy, Prokhorchuk," he said, "you've acted according to regulations!" Whereupon the fire chief smiled and added: "You haven't noticed it, but your right mustachio is aflame." Prokhorchuk smiled and aimed a jet at his mustachio. It was dawning.

He: Why must you have that?

She: What?

He: The burning mustachio.

She: I put it in for the humor of the thing. The man was so absorbed in his work that he didn't notice that his mustache was ablaze.

He: Believe me, you should delete it. Since there's no fire, the house isn't burning and

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there's no need to burn any mustachios.

She: And what about the element of laughter?

He: There'll be laughter all right. When do people laugh? When things are good for them. And isn't it good that there's no fire? It's very good. And so everybody will laugh. Read what you have now.

She: (reading) "A Noble Deed." It was the dead of night —three o'clock. Some people slept while others kept a sharp lookout. From the fourth floor window of a large grey house somebody shouted: "We are not on fire!" "Good boy, Prokhorchuk!" said Fire Chief Gorbushin to Fireman Prokhorchuk, a middle-aged Ukrainian with large black mustachios, "you're following the regulations." Prokhorchuk smiled and aimed a jet of water at his mustachio. It was dawning.

He: There we have a good piece of writing! Now it can be published!

(*Translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew*)

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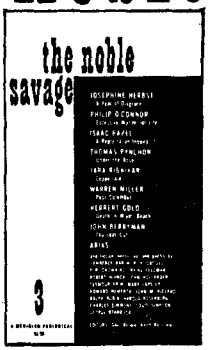

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